

No. 18

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the world of bizarre video



THIS ISSUE:

Over the Threshold with **Barbet Schroeder**
The Wild World of Doug Hobart, Part II
Plus More Bizarre and Unusual Home Video!

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Some have continued searching. All have come up empty-handed.
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ECCO

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SAVAGES FROM HELL

AN INNOCENT GIRL THE PRIZE IN A DIRTY GAME



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FRONT COVER: Bridget Fonda from **Single White Female** by Stephen R. Bissette. Photo of Idi Amin from **General Idi Amin Dada: Autoportrait**.

BACK COVER: Jean-Pierre Leaud in pigface from Pier Paolo Pasolini's **Pigpen** (1969), which is not mentioned elsewhere in this issue. So don't bother looking.

Inside The ECCO Chamber

Welcome, readers - new and old - to ECCO, **The World Of Bizarre Video** #18. Because of a recent distribution deal that will put this issue in the hands of more readers than any previous edition, it's a good time to reiterate our reason for being (or *raison d'être*, as Jerry Lewis fans might say). So don't let the slight facelift fool you, regular readers. Read on.

With all due respect to those whose aim is otherwise, ECCO is not a "more gore, bigger tits" fanzine. That focus is already covered by a number of 'zines; another one's not needed. Our goal is to search for the unexpected in films that have traditionally been maligned not only by the mainstream press but by the arid arbiters of the alcoves of academia. We also aim to illuminate the heretofore unknown careers of actors, directors, and technicians, inspired eccentrics whose work in low-budget films was (is) the result of their love of show business and easy money rather than by some vague desire to pay homage to the classics they studied in film school. Are these goals contradictory, or even schizophrenic? We think not, for pedantry rarely produces either good art or commerce.

But don't accuse us of anti-intellectualism. We're also disappointed by the lack of reflection in today's moviegoer. When I caught **Fire**, **Walk With Me** at a cineplex in my neighborhood, a semi-rural enclave fifty miles from Washington, DC, I was warned about the movie's "problems" on my way into the theater by none other than the ticket taker. With his long hair, pierced ear, and well-rehearsed smirk, he would have been pegged as a bohemian in years past (although that look now signifies "norm"). He advised me to reconsider my choice of movies. "Hey, maaan, I never watched the tv show (**Twin Peaks**), but I saw this movie last night and it doesn't make any sense!" He seemed genuinely perplexed that I was undaunted, offering a last attempt at dissuading me. "It's your money."

Thus challenged, I tried to explain why I would willingly attend a movie that "didn't make sense." We used to call them "head" movies, I explained, because it was up to each viewer to mentally tie together elements that the filmmakers had intentionally left disconnected. Then after the movie, friends, dates, co-workers, fellow students would compare notes. In so doing, you often learned more about the thought processes of your acquaintances than about the movie itself. (I was reminded of an officious, much-despised seventh grade math teacher who, upon seeing **2001**, remarked of its conclusion: "That was God destroying mankind for his lack of humility." May she rot in Hell.) But you were also made aware of a diversity of opinion extending beyond "that was cool," "that sucked," or "that didn't make sense."

The kid looked at me as if I had stepped off a UFO in a Fred Flassic gold lame' jumpsuit. "Well, if just one person likes it, I guess it's okay," he concluded, eager to end a conversation that must have seemed to him to be yet another "when I was your age we used to walk fifteen miles to school barefoot" diatribe. Most critics were less kind to the movie. They - along with the industry itself - have this kid in mind. ECCO wants this kid to realize he's been served shit on a silver platter by accountants who duck and cover at the first prospect of originality. By the way, despite its high octane self-indulgence, the painful **Fire**, **Walk With Me** probably makes too much sense for those who prefer Messrs. Costner and Hughes.

We ECCO scribes also despise the condescending "so bad it's good" mentality promulgated by the Medved brothers (one of whom, incidentally, has resurfaced as a reactionary crackpot) and then later by the creators of the popular **Comedy Channel** series **Mystery Science Theater 3000**. We're perplexed by the praise heaped upon this program by a bulbous television critic known for blackmailing one of the major networks into giving his numbskull boyfriend a plum job lest he pan their new series in his well-respected newspaper column. With their low budgets and paltry resources, how easy B-movies are to

ridicule. We appreciate "bad" movies also, but don't need a standup comedian's equivalent of a sitcom laugh track to enjoy them. A truly daring series would apply the **MST 3000** treatment to **Far And Away**, **Shining Through**, **Sister Act**, or even **Gone With The Wind**.

As new readers may have deduced by now, we're not too concerned with being on the side of the (Warning: dreadful catch-phrase following) "politically correct." In fact, we nearly tossed our tuna melt upon learning of a new book by the mother-daughter team of Judith and Jessica Maxwell that attempts to rewrite nursery rhymes in non-violent, feminist terms. **The Feminist Revised Mother Goose Rhymes** (Veda Vangarde) has the farmer's wife dancing with the three blind mice instead of whacking off their tails with a kitchen utensil, and claims that the old woman of the shoe knew exactly what to do (and no, not tubal ligation).

Readers familiar with the works of the late child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim may recall his contention that the violent imagery of nursery rhymes helps prepare youngsters for life's unpleasant twists and turns in a manner in which their delicate psyches can handle; that is, through projecting true-to-life circumstances onto imaginary points of identification (gingerbread men, talking animals, etc.). The Maxwells' book reverses that formula, promising youngsters a life devoid of disappointment and cruelty; a never-never land of unending goodwill. Such children may lack the savvy to deal with lunch money hustlers in grade school, or to cope with the realization that not everyone is as nice as one might hope for. What's next for the Maxwells? **The Feminist Shakespeare**? **The Non-Violent Homer**?

Long-time readers already know of our war against **Blockbuster Video**. We've railed against their regressive policies since issue #11 back in October 1989. The fight has subsequently been picked up by other newsletters and magazines, most recently by **Film Threat Video**. But **Blockbuster** is winning: today they're the largest video chain in the U.S., and they use their position to wield power over even the largest of video distributors. In the past, **Blockbuster** has forced video companies to make excessive cuts to their product or alter the box art, bowed to the ravings of fundamentalist fanatics by refusing to accept videos given the NC-17 rating (including the critically acclaimed **The Cook**, **The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover**), and bragged to trade publications about their success in shutting down independently owned video outlets.

Blockbuster's most recent action has even industry insiders scratching their heads in puzzlement. With an announcement citing their move as a "business decision," **Blockbuster** has refused to stock Woody Allen's **Shadows And Fog**, purportedly on the grounds that it is not "commercially viable." Much more likely is the explanation that the fascistic chain is trying to impress fundamentalist watchdogs by "punishing" Allen for his sordid real-life affairs, which include accusations of child abuse from wife Mia Farrow (who blew her credibility years ago when she willingly married Frank "shut up and deal, cunt!" Sinatra) that were recently dismissed in court.

The **Blockbuster** position is summed up in a letter published in **Film Threat Video** #7 in which Wallace W. Knief, a spokesman for the chain, asks the opposite: should **Blockbuster** be forced to carry a video they don't wish to distribute? This argument has previously been used by **Blockbuster** CEO and billionaire Wayne "The Stain"

Huizenga, who also owns the garbage disposal company **Waste Management**. Knief continues in his letter by offering that customers who want to rent **Shadows And Fog** will simply have to obtain the tape elsewhere. With **Blockbuster's** ultimate goal of becoming America's only video rental outlet, where might that be?

One has to wonder if the decision might not also have been inspired by antisemitism. After all, **Blockbuster** does stock the Moslem religious epic **Mohammed, Messenger Of God** (yes, you read right, Shiek Omar Abdel-Rahman, **Blockbuster** is renting that yankee infidel abomination **MOHAMMED, MESSENGER OF GOD!**). And it's rumored that Salman Rushdie frequents **Blockbuster Video** outlets in his rapid forays across the U.S. Unfortunately, we've been unable to verify assertions that the late Meir Kahane was a major **Blockbuster** stockholder.

Following the lead of **Wal-Mart** and **McDonalds**, **Blockbuster Video** is wringing the last remnants of regional character from American business. If they succeed, all video rental outlets will stock the same movies in the same atrociously arranged sections. Lately, we've heard of **Blockbuster's** plans to open a resort in the Florida Everglades, a region that has already been severely defaced by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in their botched attempt to control flooding. The news is hardly surprising given Huizenga's money-grubbing ethics and disdain for regional resources.

It's time to choose sides, ECCO readers. If you drive past independently owned video stores or less fascistic outlets (such as **West Coast**, **Tower**, or smaller regional chains) on your way to **Blockbuster**, I don't want you to read this magazine. In fact, you can go fuck yourself. Of course I mean that in a nice way.

Speaking of getting fucked, the **Video Vault** of Alexandria, Virginia was shut down by the IRS during the months of February and March, 1993. After painfully slow dealings with bureaucrats and their lawyers, during which time the **Vault's** starving owners were forced to barbecue their dog Edy for sustenance, the **Video Vault** has reopened for business to the gratitude and relief of thousands of fans of alternative movies. For their perseverance in dealing with humorless, sadistic bureaucrats, we dedicate this issue to the **Video Vault**. They still offer the most incredible selection of mail-order video rentals that you're likely to find anywhere. Give 'em a call, toll-free, on **1-800-VAULT-66** to find out how to become a member.

This issue we conclude our overview of the incredible career of makeup man **Doug Hobart**, and also present a critique of the dark comedies of film director **Barbet Schroeder**. **Harold Clarke** looks at a low-budget British exploitation film that prefigured the "angry young man" movement, and **Steve Bissette** plays the accordion with former Ugandan dictator **General Idi Amin Dada**. There's lots more, including book reviews and independent film and video productions. So enjoy reading, but remember: you can be jailed in England just for owning a copy of **Cannibal Holocaust**. Here in the U.S., several state bills currently in circulation attempt to address media violence similarly.

We'd like to thank the following people for their help with this issue of ECCO: Doug Hobart, Tim Lucas, Jim McCabe, Jim Murray, Sam Stetson, Mike Vraney.

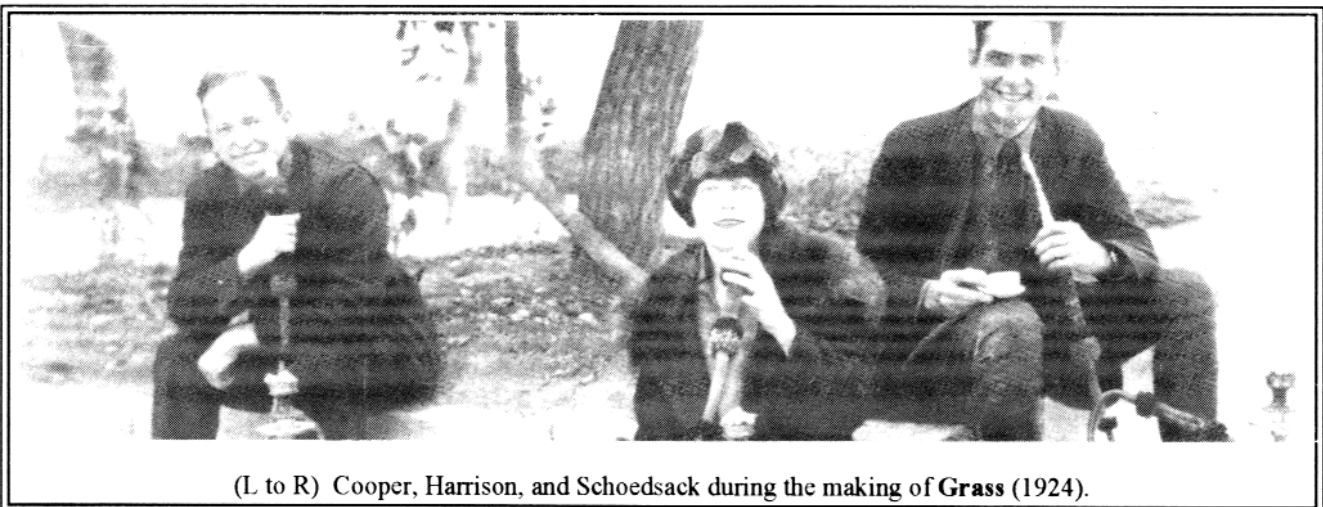
Charles Kilgore

Charles Kilgore

Kongfathers

Filmmakers Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Beaumont Schoedsack are best known for their landmark adventure film **King Kong** (1933), but the two had previously been responsible for several of the most ambitious, wonderfully crafted documentaries ever attempted. Both men certainly had the credentials: Cooper himself had been an aviator, a merchant seaman, a news correspondent for **The New York Times**, a big game hunter, and author (he co-wrote 1924's **The Sea Gypsy**) before teaming up with Schoedsack. For his part,

Schoedsack had begun his career working for Mack Sennett at Keystone Studios before establishing his reputation as a widely-travelled news cameraman who filmed infantry action during the war for the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Indeed, the characters of Carl Denham and Jack Driscoll from **Kong** are thinly-veiled caricatures of Cooper and Schoedsack. Two of Cooper and Schoedsack's most compelling pre-**Kong** features from the silent era, both documentary precursors of the



(L to R) Cooper, Harrison, and Schoedsack during the making of **Grass** (1924).

"mondo" movie craze, have recently been issued on video in restored versions with newly recorded soundtracks by Milestone Film & Video of New York.

In 1924, Cooper and Schoedsack teamed up with fellow adventurer, journalist, and sometimes spy Marguerite Harrison (whom Cooper credited with saving his life years before when the two were prisoners in a Russian jail) for an expedition into the region now known as Iran. The expedition was the result of research between Cooper and Harrison in finding a tribe whose lives would form the basis of a dramatic documentary. They chose as their subjects the Bakhtyari, who decades later were



Bakhtyari men share a pipe of opium in *Grass*.

described by philosopher Jacob Bronowski as being "...near as any surviving, vanishing people can be to the nomad ways of ten thousand years ago."

Along with cameraman Schoedsack, Cooper and Harrison accompanied the Bakhtyari tribe, over fifty thousand strong, on their annual trek across more than 150 miles of barren desert, hazardous rapids, and icy mountain ranges to take their livestock to greener pastures. Cooper and Schoedsack's film of this astounding journey is the classic documentary *Grass* (1925), "A Nation's Battle For Life."

Released by Paramount Pictures, *Grass* is an incredible document of the human will to survive against seemingly insurmountable odds. Highlights include the tribe's crossing of a turbulent river, half a mile wide, on barges kept afloat with inflated goatskins; and their scaling of Zardah Kuh, an icy, snow-covered, 50,000 foot tall mountain (with most tribesmen barefoot!). The determination of these men, women, and children is nothing less than awe-inspiring, and the filmmakers bring an immediacy to the depiction of their plight that will have even modern-day viewers tense with excitement.

In her 1935 autobiography *There's Always Tomorrow*, Marguerite Harrison was critical of the concessions Cooper and Schoedsack had agreed upon for the film's presentation. Ridiculous titles and subtitles were added by Paramount, attributing comments to the Bakhtyari that they would have never made. For example, the image of a young Bakhtyari girl carrying a goat on her shoulders is accompanied with a title card reading "And everywhere that Mary went..." As the tribesmen step into cold glacial waters, the title card "Br-r-r!" appears. Cutesy titles also attribute dialogue to pets and livestock. Harrison rightly felt that these concessions cheapened what was to have been an authentic document of a real-life drama. But despite the inappropriate title cards, *Grass* remains an amazing record of an ancient way of life.

Two years later, Cooper and Schoedsack journeyed to Thailand to film *Chang* (1927), "A Drama of the Wilderness." Unlike *Grass*, but similar to the films of famed documentarian

Robert Flaherty, *Chang* is not pure documentary. Events were obviously staged by Cooper and Schoedsack to present a compelling storyline. Nevertheless, *Chang* is riveting filmmaking that slyly seduces the viewer into accepting it as a bona fide document of man's eternal struggle against the unbeatable forces of nature.

Chang concerns Kru, a Laotian tribesman who has moved his family from the safety of his former village and into the inhospitable depths of the surrounding jungle. Scenes of his many hardships (leopards eating his livestock, the family's rice crop destroyed by elephants) are balanced with naturalistic depictions of idyllic life among the untamed denizens of the wilderness at their most beautiful and fascinating.

Although *Chang* shares similar title card problems with *Grass*, its visual highlights are unforgettable. The segment depicting the destruction of an entire village by a herd of elephants is amazing in its scope, and prefigures King Kong's rampage through the native village from the team's later film. And despite the worldwide success of *King Kong*, Cooper himself claimed in 1966 that *Chang* was his greatest movie achievement. After viewing this rewarding adventure, few will disagree.

Both *Grass* and *Chang* are represented with beautifully restored prints and new soundtracks that probably reflect the regional music of their subjects better than their original release scores. Milestone Film & Video is to be commended for making these rarely screened treasures available on home video. Their appeal stretches beyond the realm of film historians and documentary buffs, and should pique the interests of anyone with but a grain of curiosity about the world around them.

[*Grass* and *Chang* are available for \$43.70 each postpaid from Milestone Film & Video, Inc., 275 West 96th Street, Suite 28C, New York, New York 10025.]



Desolation In The U.K.

by Harold Clarke

The 1950s British film industry scarcely acknowledged the burgeoning malaise that threatened to obliterate England's post-W.W. II ideals and ambitions. Celluloid offerings during this time primarily entertained the masses, virtually disregarding the emotional and intellectual smothering of the nation's populace. In 1956, however, three filmmakers, Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, and Tony Richardson, attempted to shatter the British film industry's complacency by introducing the Free Cinema movement. In so doing, this trio of cinematic revolutionaries sought to upend Anglo culture by exposing its stagnancy and erecting a more fulfilling social structure. **Beat Girl**, made in 1960, just before the Free Cinema movement reached its nadir, expanded upon the movement's crusading sentiment by presenting an unflinching view of England's decay and decline.

Beat Girl (aka **Wild for Kicks**) traces the adolescent travails of Jennifer Linden (Gillian Hills), an equally anguished and confused London art school student. Jennifer's anxiety accelerates when her father Paul (David Farrar), a prominent architect, returns from a three-month trip abroad with his 24-year-old French bride Nichole (Noelle Adam). Jennifer takes an immediate and intense dislike to her new stepmother and, despite Nichole's attempts to establish a congenial rapport, misses few opportunities to express her contempt.

Matters deteriorate further when Jennifer, through an accidental encounter with Greta (Delphi Lawrence), a dancer at a burlesque house called Les Girls Club, learns that Nichole once performed as a stripper - and maybe worse - before she married Paul. Jennifer uses this knowledge to blackmail her stepmother and to gain the advantage in her increasingly acrimonious relationship with her father and Nichole.

During this time, however, Greta's boyfriend Kenny (Christopher Lee), the owner of Les Girls Club, expresses a lascivious interest in Jennifer and schemes to corral her into his stable of strippers. Back at home, Paul eventually discovers his wife's secret. During the ensuing fracas, Jennifer storms out of the house to seek deliverance with Kenny. Upon arrival, though, she finds herself ensnared in a web of deceit and treachery that, at the film's conclusion, unravels in jealousy and murder.

Beat Girl has an advantage over most low-budget films in that it benefits from numerous outstanding performances from actors and actresses who attained subsequent success in more visible cinematic endeavors. Gillian Hills, who later appeared in Antonioni's **Blow Up**, effectively projects the simultaneous malice and vulnerability that afflicts Jennifer. Her resemblance to Tuesday Weld in **Pretty Poison** is uncanny, and, except for the difference in the two films' denouements, one could argue that the two characters are motivated by identical internal demons and unsavory ambitions.

Shirley Ann Field, who later garnered critical acclaim for her roles in **Saturday Night and Sunday Morning**, **The Entertainer**, **Alfie**, and Michael Powell's notorious **Peeping Tom**, excels as Jennifer's friend Dodo. Her character, along

with those portrayed by budding international film star Oliver Reed and British singing sensation Adam Faith, personifies the alienation and listlessness that besieged English youth during the late fifties and early sixties. Christopher Lee, the self-proclaimed "tall, dark, and gruesome" horror movie symbol, sparkles as the crustacean and predatory burlesque club owner. Lee not only chills with his sinister charm, but also serves as a form of comic relief. Such lines as "Somebody down there likes me," uttered when sultry, young Jennifer enters his office, both horrify and amuse.

Several technicians involved in the production of **Beat Girl** also achieved future artistic success. Cameraman Walter Lassally later served in the same capacity for other Free Cinema projects. Some of his more notable movies include Richardson's **A Taste Of Honey** and **The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner**. Lassally was also cameraman for Richardson's 1963 breakthrough film, **Tom Jones**. The following year, he claimed an Academy Award for his work on

Zorba The Greek. Lassally's proficiency is evident throughout **Beat Girl**, where he effectively exploits the most shadowy settings and, as a result, is able to use this darkened backdrop as a metaphor for Great Britain's mid-century despair.

Finally, John Barry, composer of the James Bond theme and voluminous other movie soundtracks, prepared the sizzling rock'n'roll score for **Beat Girl**. His band, The John Barry Seven, performs with an urgent, driving, almost frenzied beat periodically throughout the

film, in marked contrast to the bloodless, joyless, and sexless crooning of pop singer Adam Faith.

One early, prevalent theme in the Free Cinema movement was the suggestion that the first step towards redeeming a corrupt system of values was to contemplate its destruction. The theme continually surfaces throughout **Beat Girl**. To be sure, the film's exploitation devices (youth culture, rock'n'roll, stripping, prostitution, murder) offer provocative fare. None of these, however, successfully mask the underlying desolation. Nearly every character seeks to escape a life that offers little hope and even less significance. Whether the solution is to construct an impregnable metropolis or eliminate undesirable elements, marry to escape a soiled past, or consort with friends at beatnik dives and groove to communal nihilism, all of **Beat Girl**'s principals wish to destroy the present and enter a new world free of stressful and debilitating influences.

The shattering homicide that concludes **Beat Girl** embodies the first step in fulfilling Free Cinema's notion of social and cultural reorganization. Through this initially destructive development lies reconciliation and redemption. In time, the Free Cinema movement was overshadowed by the "Swinging London" scene. However, for its widespread reputation as a low-budget irrelevancy, **Beat Girl** endures for its tackling of themes and concepts with a searing perspective that eluded many purportedly socially-conscious films of its era.

[**Beat Girl** is available from Sinister Cinema, Dept. EC, P.O. Box 4369, Medford, OR 97501-0168 for \$19 postpaid.]



Over The Threshold With Barbet Schroeder

After the critical and commercial acclaim given his film adaptation of Alan Dershowitz's **Reversal Of Fortune**, Barbet Schroeder seemed poised to be the next Hollywood directorial superstar. Schroeder's film was praised by both mainstream and counter-culture critics, and earned the Academy Award for its star, Jeremy Irons, and a nomination for its director. Like Paul Verhoeven, another European now directing high-profile features in Hollywood, Schroeder had moved into the mainstream. Or so it seemed. Although his eighteen million dollar **Single White Female** was a success for both Schroeder and Columbia Pictures, the director's image remains that of an outsider who has grudgingly been allowed inside.

Although he's finally made the Hollywood "A-list" of film directors, Schroeder seems to have been forgotten by the fact-obsessed circle of "serious" movie scribes. His recent high-profile features have led to coverage in glossy commercial magazines such as **Vanity Fair** and **Premiere**, but Schroeder is nowhere to be found in the highly-touted new edition of the **International Directory of Films and Filmmakers** (Putnam). He's also not mentioned in John Wakeman's **World Film Directors** (H.W. Wilson Co.) nor in David Ragan's pricey **Who's Who In Hollywood** (Facts On File, 1992). These omissions may seem conspiratorial, but they're possibly the result of Schroeder's films being too arcane for the mainstream yet too formal for avant-garde obscurists.

Schroeder's reluctance to live in any one location for more than several years at a time was no doubt inspired by his peripatetic childhood. He was born in Teheran in 1941, the son of a Swiss geologist who worked for American oil companies and a German mother whose own parentage consisted of a psychologist and an actress who specialized in the stylized emoting of German expressionism. Four years later, Jean-William Schroeder moved his family to Bogota, Columbia, then the site of riots and political violence. In interviews Schroeder has recalled witnessing such grisly spectacles as a man's beheading with a machete during a riot. He also became aware of suspicious older individuals with German accents who stopped talking

whenever anyone approached. Schroeder left this threatening climate for Paris with his mother Ursula when his parents separated in 1952.

In Paris, Schroeder was initiated into sex at age eleven by a friend of his mother. He seduced more of her friends and acquaintances, and was soon paying for his pleasures in French whorehouses. By his mid-teens, Schroeder claims that he was living with a girlfriend in a Parisian apartment building.

During this period of sexual discovery, he immersed himself in the works of the symbolist poets, particularly Baudelaire and Rimbaud. He also became a jazz fanatic, and at a young age was the European promoter for such well-respected musicians as Freddie Hubbard and Art Blakey and His Jazz Messengers. For a while, Schroeder toured with the musicians throughout Europe, ever alert to the attempted ministrations of dope dealers. Like other young Frenchmen, he was also fascinated by the bigger-than-life western epics of such directors as Anthony Mann. He became a habitue of the Cinematheque Francaise at the time in which its founder, Henri Langlois, was a champion of American-made action films. Eager for filmmaking experience, Schroeder offered to assist expatriate German director Fritz Lang, who was preparing a film to be shot on location in India. Upon arriving in Bombay, Schroeder discovered that Lang's film had been cancelled. Nevertheless, he stayed on for nearly a year, working as a photojournalist for a meager salary. In 1958 Schroeder returned to Paris and began to contribute criticism to **L'Air de Paris** and, more importantly, to **Les Cahiers du Cinema**, the influential film magazine that helped spawn the French new wave cinema movement.

In 1960 Schroeder attended the Sorbonne, graduating with a philosophy degree in 1963. While a student there, he entered into a partnership with the editor of **Cahiers du Cinema**, soon-to-be director Eric Rohmer. The two formed the production company Les Films du Losange in 1962 to

of beauty, sex and drugs:

"'More' probably contains more footage of naked bodies than any other film that has made it past Plymouth Rock. It's strong stuff. A powerful movie about drugs. Mimsy Farmer as Estelle, is one of the real baddies of all time, a totally amoral person who shoots heroin (even under her tongue!), cavorts in the nude, lies, steals, makes love to girls, and destroys every man who falls in love with her."

—The Sunday New York Times

"'More' is tough, candid stuff, clearly among the good ones."

—National Observer

"A very beautiful, very romantic movie."

—The New York Times



finance and release Rohmer's proposed films. Schroeder produced, narrated, and played the lead role in Rohmer's first short film, *La Boulangere de Monceau* (*The Baker's Girl*), which was made for roughly \$5,000, and was the first in a series of adaptations of the director's own short stories and novellas that he referred to as his "Moral Tales." Rohmer and Schroeder's guerilla moviemaking techniques, filming scenes in silent 16mm in the streets of Paris without first obtaining permission, were typical of the inventiveness - necessitated by budgetary restrictions - of such New Wave directors as Jean Rouch and Francois Truffaut. Unfortunately, *La Boulangere de Monceau* was never officially released. The following year Schroeder produced Rohmer's *Le Carriere de Suzanne* (*Suzanne's Career*), the second Moral Tale. As with Rohmer's first, the running time of *Le Carriere de Suzanne* was less than feature length, relegating it to infrequent showings and scant overseas distribution. That same year, Schroeder served as an assistant to Jean-Luc Godard, another *Cahiers du Cinema* alumnus, on the latter's *Les Carabiniers* (1963). Schroeder also played the role of a car salesman in the film.

The year 1965 marked Schroeder's first turn as producer of a full-length feature, the omnibus *Paris Vu Par* (*Six In Paris*). The film consisted of six segments by New Wave directors Douchet, Rouch, Pollet, Rohmer, Godard, and Chabrol. Later that year, Schroeder married Cornelia Embiricos, daughter of a Greek shipping magnate. Their wedding was held on a private island owned by the bride's family, and was attended by Maria Callas and Greta Garbo. Striving to make the ceremony memorable, the Embiricos family hired a full orchestra to entertain guests. A massive fireworks display illuminated the crowd as the newlyweds set out for their honeymoon on a huge sailboat. The metaphorical boat was to sink five years later.

After the European success of *Paris Vu Par*, which wasn't released in the U.S. until 1969, Les Films du Losange scored an international success with Rohmer's third moral tale, a feature film, *La Collectionneuse* (1967). Around this time the company also produced films for Fassbinder, Jacques Rivette, and Marguerite Duras, among others. Schroeder himself began production on his directorial debut, based on his semi-autobiographical story about an early affair with a young junkie. He and Chabrol screenwriter Paul Gegauff co-scripted *More* (1968), which Schroeder produced and directed for under \$160,000.

More is the tale of a young German student who becomes infatuated with Estelle, an American "femme fatale in a t-shirt" who draws him into her world of casual sex and drug addiction. In the film's opening moments, Stefan, the student, virtually predicts his downward-spiralling future: "I finished my studies in May. I wanted to burn all the bridges, all the formulas, and if I got burned that was alright, too." Stefan is like a moth drawn to flame for its promise of release. It's easy to see Stefan's quest for experience as Schroeder's after noting that the writer/director has admitted that his fictitious character's fate "...could have happened to me."

Schroeder cast young German actor Klaus Grunberg and American actress Mimsy Farmer, who had previously appeared in low-budget American youth market movies *Riot On Sunset Strip* and *Hot Rods To Hell* (both 1967). He also hired the late, lamented cameraman Nestor Almendros, and began a seven-picture working relationship with editor Denise De Casabianca. His mother Ursula's resort house on the exotic Spanish island of Ibiza, a notorious sixties hippie resort, became the primary setting for the tragicomic tale. Pink Floyd, who had themselves made a pilgrimage to Ibiza in search of sun and sensation, were hired to create the film's pulsing score.

Although it received enthusiastic reviews from the New York Times and the National Observer, *More* did not receive universal critical praise. Film critic John Simon singled it out for derision as "that new kind of film...the masters (of which) are Godard and Chabrol," also complaining that flat-chested Mimsy Farmer was not up to her nude scenes. (That same year, Simon trashed Truffaut's *Mississippi Mermaid*, citing Catherine Deneuve's flat derriere as a major irritant. Apparently Simon believed that by 1969, the New Wave was bottoming out.) *More* was not a commercial success in the U.S., where it was released with an X-rating, but it raked in millions throughout Europe.

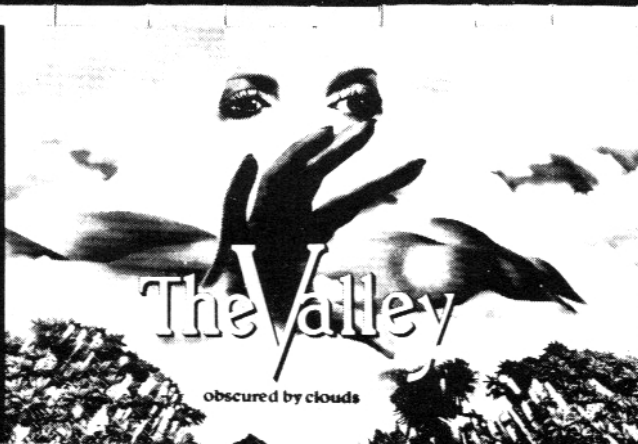
Despite a compromised script that occasionally ignores reason, *More* was a solid, well-noticed debut that made the most of an exotic location, photographed by a young cinematic genius, to offset its low budget. Almendros' sunny, hallucinogenic images of Ibiza are in sharp contrast with the dark, shadowy world of junkies from previous films. Stefan's Hell looks like Heaven.

WE HAVE NOT CEASED FROM
EXPLORATION/
AND THE END OF ALL OUR
EXPLORING/
WILL BE TO ARRIVE WHERE
WE STARTED/
AND KNOW THE PLACE FOR
THE FIRST TIME.

T.S. ELIOT
(FOUR QUARTETS)

"EXOTIC, SUSPENSEFUL AND
INTRIGUING. Bulle Ogier
demands to be seen."

—LOS ANGELES TIMES



The Valley

obscured by clouds

"STRIKINGLY POWERFUL. A
tantalizing mixture of latter-day
Tolkien and visionary philosophy.
A fascinating example of
cinematic Pink Floyd."

—ROLLING STONE

"BULLE OGIER IS BRILLIANT.
'The Valley' slides across the
senses with a liquid sensuality.
Go to it with an open mind."

—CRAWDADDY

Mike Kaplan presents **BULLE OGIER** in Barbet Schroeder's "THE VALLEY"
starring Michael Gothard, Jean-Pierre Kalfon and the Mapuga Tribe and its Chiefs **Music: PINK FLOYD**

Filmed in Techniscope in Papua-New Guinea Photography by Nestor Almendros

A LAGOON Presentation For Circle Associates Written & Directed by **BARBET SCHROEDER** Original soundtrack on Harvest records & tapes

With his first film, Schroeder entered the world of international filmmaking. But his marriage, which had been disintegrating for several years, finally collapsed amid Cornelia's suicide attempts. Several years after the breakup, she succeeded in taking her own life. Schroeder, oddly inspired by her melancholy and death, immersed himself...in the production of films by new wave directors including Wim Wenders, Claude Chabrol, and partner Eric Rohmer, whose



Schroeder on location during the filming of *The Valley*.

award-winning 1970 feature *My Night At Mauds* established him as one of Europe's leading filmmakers. With the success of *More* and Rohmer's film, Schroeder began work on his second feature.

Originally conceived about a group of hippies in search of paradise on Earth, *La Vallee* (*Obscured by Clouds*) (1972) evolved into a mystical allegory about the cost of discovering nirvana. Schroeder and Gegauff's script concerns a small band of young outcasts who seek an uncharted valley hidden deep in the mountains of Papua, New Guinea. They believe that earthly paradise awaits them there, and set out looking for it in a Land Rover, accompanied by the materialistic young wife of a diplomat. During their trek they encounter the primitive tribes of New Guinea, including the Mapuga, who warn the group that the valley they seek is the domain of the gods.

The Valley was filmed on location in Papua, New Guinea over a period of six grueling months. Throughout filming, the cast and crew virtually lived the existence of the fictitious band of explorers they were portraying. French actress Bulle Ogier, who had met and been seduced by Schroeder in a Parisian nightclub during the premiere of *More*, was cast as Viviane, the diplomat's wife who forsakes her quest for exotic feathers to adorn her boutique in favor of a spiritual search for a heaven of sensual awareness. Jean-Pierre Kalfon, who had appeared in Godard's *Weekend* (1967), portrayed Gaetan, the expedition's mystical leader, while Michael Gothard (the torturer in Ken Russell's *The Devils*, 1971, and the modern-day vampire of Gordon Hessler's *Scream And Scream Again*, 1970) was Olivier, the cool rationalist who serves as the group's voice of reason. Nestor Almendros was once again director of photography. Pink Floyd contributed another soundtrack.

The Valley received praise from a diverse group of publications, including *Rolling Stone*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Seventeen*, and *The London Evening Standard*. Most notices singled out Ogier's performance as the diplomat's wife, whose own inner journey parallels both the explorers' trek and Stefan's search for the fires of experience in *More*. In an interview conducted by French filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier, Schroeder explained the connection between *Le Vallee* and his first film: "In one shot of *More*, I had *Le Vallee* in mind: we see a chart of a human brain. The areas still unknown to modern science are left blank. The hero comments: 'The brain is like a map of Africa, still largely uncharted. It is in these blank spots that the highest functions of reason and creativity take place.' At the beginning, *Le Vallee* (is) the story of a woman's discovery of life and pleasure. But pleasure is a serious thing, full of anguish, which has no ultimate direction but a relationship with death. One must pay for it... The two films realize a transformation and a journey of characters who try to push themselves to the limit, with all of the risks which that involves." The concept of self-discovery is further elaborated through the verse by H. Prinzhorn which accompanied the film's pressbook:

There are cliches which are like myths: they put man in a para-normal state. The appearance of an unknown city in the jungle, the discovery of hidden treasure, tantalize the coldest imagination. Of all these cliches, the most poignantly evocative is the search for Paradise lost, for the Eden which lives within us all.

Unfortunately, *The Valley* was denied distribution in the U.S. for ten years, even then receiving only limited engagements in major cities. It was rereleased seven years later as a midnight movie to cash in on the popularity of Pink Floyd.



Bulle Ogier discovers her roots in a scene from *The Valley*.

To this day, more people know of the soundtrack than of the film itself. Even rarer is *Sing-Sing* (1971) the documentary featurette that Schroeder made while directing *The Valley* in New Guinea.

Upon returning from New Guinea, Schroeder discovered the idea for his third feature in a collection of newspaper clippings he had amassed about Ugandan dictator General Idi Amin. A



Schroeder, Almendros, and an unidentified woman experience the Idi Amin Wildlife Tour. Production still taken during the filming of **General Idi Amin Dada: Autoportrait**.

phone call to Uganda confirmed that the megalomaniacal despot was more than willing to be the subject of a documentary feature. Along with Almendros, assistant cameraman Jean-Claude Riviere, and (perhaps) Bulle Ogier, Schroeder flew to Uganda in early 1974 to film the allegedly insane dictator in action.

Schroeder could not have picked a more monstrous subject. After rising to power in 1971 during a bloody military coup, former Chief of Staff Amin began his reign of terror by chasing out Indian residents and seizing their property. Public executions of suspected traitors became commonplace. Inflation soared (in one year, food prices rose from 20% to 50%) as Amin strove to develop Uganda as a military superpower for his planned war against Israel. Thousands of Ugandans disappeared overnight, never to be seen again. (See Steve Bissette's review of *Amin: The Rise And Fall* in this issue for more fact-based atrocities.)

Schroeder's **General Idi Amin Dada: Autoportrait** (1974) is one of the funniest, and most frightening, documentaries ever made. Although Amin himself collaborated on the film, even supplying the maddening accordion soundtrack, the resulting portrait recalls Alfred Jarry's celebrated Dadaist play **Ubu Roi** and its despicable subject, the buffoonish ruler Pere Ubu. A wonderful coincidence, then, that Amin welcomed the nickname "Dada," an apt moniker for a killer clown. He is the living embodiment of Jarry's vision of a composite of human indignities.

Although Amin envisioned the project as a propaganda tool, his aims were undercut both by the filmmakers' wily prowess in capturing the impulsive madman behind the uniform and by their own commentary on scenes staged by Amin to bolster his

image as powerful and respected leader. A board meeting in which Amin castigates his minister of foreign affairs is offset with Schroeder's commentary that the man's body was found floating in the Nile less than two weeks after the scene was filmed. The joyous, seemingly spontaneous welcome of Amin when he arrives at a Ugandan village is revealed by Schroeder to have been previously rehearsed. On-screen, Amin giggles wildly when reminiscing about his notorious telegrams to heads of state (one sent to Kurt Waldheim the day after the Munich massacre offered that Hitler had gassed Jews because he and the German people knew "they could not be trusted.").

The film's unmistakably parodic point of view was not taken lightly in Uganda. When Amin learned from spies that audiences were laughing at the disparity between the images and the commentary, the deranged dictator assumed that Schroeder's footage had been sabotaged by Israeli film editors. He demanded that scenes be removed, holding over a hundred French residents of Kampala hostage to ensure that his demand was taken seriously. The unfortunate hundred would have probably been slaughtered had not the cuts been made; they were, but the footage was restored as soon as Amin fell from power.

Viewers may wonder how Schroeder and crew coaxed Amin into offering himself on celluloid as an embodiment of political excess, but one theory stems from a production still taken during the making of the film. In a photo snapped during the sequence in which Amin takes his guests on a tour of a Ugandan wildlife preserve, the back of a blonde head can be seen seated directly in front of Amin. Did Schroeder use Bulle Ogier to help coax Amin, a notorious ladies' man, into delivering the boastful remarks and reckless observations that earmark the arrogance and egotism of a brutal, self-obsessed

despot? If not, just who was Amin trying to impress? This is a key question, for what is ultimately the most chilling aspect of **General Idi Amin Dada: Autoportrait** is that the viewer finds this childish murderer somehow likeable.

Alongside **Reversal Of Fortune**, **General Idi Amin Dada: Autoportrait** is one of Schroeder's most critically acclaimed films. Even fussy John Simon liked it, remarking that "...if a film's value is measurable by its ability to linger in the memory - not the worst yardstick - **Idi Amin Dada** is decidedly something of value."

Nevertheless, Simon was quick to pan Schroeder's next effort, the black comedy **Maitresse** (1976). He wasn't alone: the tale of an unlikely romance between a thief and a sweet-natured dominatrix confused even those critics who found something to admire in it. Most missed the mordant humor of Schroeder and Paul Voujargol's bizarre script.

Olivier (Gerard Depardieu) and Mario (Andre Rouyer), two con artists, pose as book salesmen to gain entry to houses and apartments they intend to later burglarize. After breaking into an apartment they have been assured by the upstairs tenant is empty, they discover a torture chamber filled with whips, chains, cages, dentist chairs, and other accoutrements of sadomasochism. They also meet the tenant, Ariane (Bulle Ogier), who is none other than the upstairs neighbor. She looks a bit different, however, dressed entirely in black leather with spiked heels and whip. After handcuffing the two, she enlists Olivier's aid in attending to one of her patrons in an adjacent room. As asked, Olivier pisses in the man's face. Mario hurriedly exits from Ariane's dungeon, but not his partner. To the amoral Olivier, it's love at first sight.

So begins one of the strangest romances ever filmed. **Maitresse** bypasses traditional morality, juxtaposing scenes detailing the passive/aggressive impulses that lie beneath the surface of "normal" heterosexual relationships with those depicting the more overt sadomasochism of Ariane and her clients. The ministrations of the dominatrix are dramatically overshadowed when Olivier becomes obsessed with discovering the identity of Gautier, Ariane's mysterious benefactor. His revelation links **Maitresse** with **Venus In Furs** and other literary precedents, but no other film outside of pornography (Radley Metzger's brilliant **The Image**) has ever so closely articulated the desires of extreme sadomasochism.

Warner Home Video is to be commended for releasing **Maitresse** to home video in its uncut version, which seems more shocking in this neo-conservative era than upon its release in 1976. Actual scenes of a man having his penis nailed to a board dramatically illustrate a complex, yet undeniable, link between pain and pleasure that few films honestly contemplate. The link also extends between the "entertainment" planned by the dominatrix for her patrons and Schroeder's, which is intended for the viewer. As Ariane, Ogier compares her role in her clients' fantasies to that of "a film director." In this sense Schroeder has also played dungeonmaster, leading his audience through morally neutral passion plays that contrast the rituals of sadomasochism with the inevitable cruelties of everyday love.

The attempted juxtaposition of "kinky" sex with routine male-female manipulations is poorly balanced during several graphic, carefully rendered scenes of actual torture. These were performed on the bodies of the paying customers of a real-life dominatrix, who was hired by Schroeder for advice and to serve as a stand-in for Ogier during such scenes as the one described in the previous paragraph. Yet the crucial love story in **Maitresse** never offers a strong depiction of "amour fou" to complement these aggressive transgressions against flesh. For most viewers, Schroeder's vision of free, unfettered love will be overshadowed by his unflinching portrayal of a sexual underworld rarely observed by outsiders.

Maitresse may have alienated critics and audiences alike by its strong refusal to adopt a moral stance in telling its perverse tale, but Schroeder stood by his vision. He refused to allow cuts, resulting in the film being given an "X" rating during its brief U.S. theatrical distribution. The film had problems abroad as well, and Schroeder barely recovered his costs.

Two years later, Schroeder resurfaced with another documentary. The very low-budget **Koko: A Talking Gorilla** initially seems too tame a subject for Schroeder's iconoclastic oeuvre, but by its finish has ruthlessly divided its audience into a pro or con position on animal rights. Koko is a gorilla under tutelage from Stanford University developmental psychology student Penny Patterson and her advisor, Dr. Carl Pribam, Professor of Neuroscience. Using sign language, Koko can communicate over 300 words; she understands hundreds more. Even more amazing is her ability to piece words together to create metaphorical descriptions for new objects.



Will open your eyes.



Bulle Ogier in Barbet Schroeder's *The Valley*.

As in the Amin documentary, Schroeder provides commentary that reveals his own position. After listening to a litany of words such as "good," "bad," and "steal," Schroeder wonders aloud if Koko will "...become the first White American Protestant gorilla?" As if the point could be misunderstood, subtitles enlighten with such observations as "One can't a priori decide that only men are human beings. It can be proved that this gorilla is also a human being. In our society, a human being has rights, as limited as they are. Giving rights to primates means opening doors to the animal world. Koko raises all the important questions about man." Schroeder and cameramen Nestor Almendros and Ned Burgess make an eloquent case for Koko, for primates, and for life in general.

In 1979, Schroeder began work on a project that would consume nine years of his life. While working on *Koko*, Schroeder had discovered the works of poet/drink Charles Bukowski. He contacted the writer, intent on having Bukowski write a script for an English-language film based on his autobiographical tales. Bukowski was initially resistant, aware of how Hollywood typically treats writers' labors of love. But Schroeder was insistent, assuring Bukowski that his script would not be rewritten without his consent.

For research, Schroeder moved into Bukowski's skid row environs for seven years. He lived for a year in the Oakwood ghetto of Los Angeles, where he witnessed robberies and attempted rapes, and fell asleep at night to the sound of weapons firing. He lived with Bukowski for awhile, fielding death threats and videotaping live performances of his stories and recitals until he had amassed over forty hours of tape. Four of those hours have been exhibited on French television and in 1989 at New York's Public Theater as *The Charles Bukowski Tapes*. But funding for the film to be based on Bukowski's screenplay, a love story about two down-and-out drunks, proved hard to secure.

While searching for funding for the Bukowski project, Schroeder co-wrote and directed a movie for German and French investors. *Question Du Chance* was based on an original script by Pascal Bonitzer, Steve Baes, and Schroeder, and was fashioned after the true-life experiences of Baes, an

ex-gambler and Schroeder's roommate. The film's title was changed to *Tricheurs (The Cheaters)* shortly before its brief U.S. engagement.

Elric (Jacques Dutronc) is addicted to gambling, especially savoring those moments when he's losing. In a casino he meets Lucy (Bulle Ogier), who appears to be on a winning streak. Elric persuades her to accompany him to the tables in hopes of winning so he can remain in the game. When her presence fails to bring him luck, Elric listens to the offers of a sinister gambler named Georg (Kurt Raab), who enlists him as a partner to help rig casino scams. The two men begin their raid on casinos across the globe, but a chance encounter between Elric and Lucy changes their path.

As in previous films, Schroeder sorts through the compulsive behavior of addicts for black humor. Elric and Lucy are as addicted to losing as they are gambling, and their enslavement is reminiscent of the addicts of *More* or the adventure junkies of *The Valley*. The swindling Georg remarks that he would "...rather be a junkie or a drunkard (than a gambler)," because "when they reach the bottom society cares for them." But Elric's whole life is based on an aesthetic of losing. "When I lose," he tells Lucy, "everything becomes beautiful. When I've won, I never look at anything." At one point he considers cutting off his fingers to end his gambling. Schroeder's realistic, and grimly hilarious, ending is the happiest that this film could reasonably offer for self-destructive compulsives Elric and Lucy.

The portrait of compulsive gambling offered in *The Cheaters* is at once funny and sickening. But American audiences in 1983 were not interested in a foreign-made film about tragicomic gamblers. *The Cheaters* received an extremely limited U.S. release, playing only major cities. Its unusual script and ethereal cinematography from Robbie Muller helped the film earn critical admiration at festival showings and art house engagements. Yet *The Cheaters* was too downbeat to appeal to fans of *The Sting* and other "caper" movies.

In 1987, Schroeder finally found a production company willing to back his Bukowski project. Cannon Films had been striving to acquire commercially savvy imported films to boost their boxoffice image beyond the action/adventure specialties

they were known for, and must have viewed the project as a respectably "arty" enhancement to their roster. But when Cannon encountered severe financial difficulties, company head Menahem Golan put the project in limbo, assuring Schroeder that the company would sell their interest in actual money spent if he were to find another backer. He did, but claims that Cannon then requested an extra million. Schroeder began mailing Golan notes in which the distraught filmmaker threatened to cut off his own body parts and mail them to the Cannon head. Soon afterwards, Schroeder arrived at the office of Cannon's lawyer with an electric jigsaw and a bottle of local anesthetic. He announced that he was going to cut off his finger if the lawyer didn't surrender the rights of the Bukowski film to him. The lawyer, who apparently hadn't seen *The Cheaters*, handed over the release papers.

Cannon eventually made the film, titled *Barfly*, for \$3 million. Mickey Rourke and Faye Dunaway were cast as drunk lovers Henry Chinaski and Wanda Wilcox. Rourke accepted the role reluctantly; unknown to Schroeder, he was undergoing psychiatric care for emotional problems brought on during the filming of *A Prayer For The Dying*. He created problems when wanting to play the Bukowski-based Chinaski in a Hawaiian shirt and with a poolside tan, a request that was denied by Schroeder. Rourke's performance in the film, however, surprised many critics who had previously dismissed him. Even Bukowski, avowedly a tough customer to please when it comes to movies, praised his portrayal of poetic, principled pug Chinaski.

Barfly is a heady mixture of commercial and independent filmmaking, a rough little B-movie with a script by literary fave Bukowski, cinematography by Robby Muller, direction by Schroeder, and an effective cast who embrace the material as if it were their lives. The pace is faster than in Schroeder's prior films, a concession to the American reluctance to accept aesthetics and atmosphere in place of dialogue and action. But *Barfly* nevertheless retains the Schroeder mix of black humor and pathos, and remains the best Bukowski adaptation yet attempted.

Schroeder's next project, 1990's black comedy *Reversal Of Fortune*, established him as that rare filmmaker who meets favor with both critics and audiences. The true story of aristocrat Claus Von Bulow's trial for inducing his wealthy wife's coma, which the defense insists was the result of a suicide attempt, *Reversal Of Fortune* demands that the formality of the law must take precedence over intuitive notions of guilt. The amoral Claus could hardly seem more guilty, but he's damned by his character rather than by evidence.

Schroeder's decision to direct *Reversal Of Fortune* for Warner Brothers is understandable; the director of *General Idi Amin Dada: Autoportrait* has claimed in interviews that he is attracted to monsters. He may have also been empathetic with the plight of a man hounded by speculations on his wife's suicide, an amoral jet-setter who enjoys the company of beautiful mistresses. Whatever the reason for his dedication to the project, *Reversal Of Fortune* emerges the best of Schroeder's later films.

As Von Bulow, Jeremy Irons provides a hilarious, though downright scary, characterization of an aging European playboy who may or may not be guilty of attempting to murder his wife. In her best screen appearance to date, Glenn Close excels as the comatose Sunny Von Bulow, and as semi-coherent Sunny in the flashback scenes. Ron Silver was born to play lawyer Dershowitz, a man whose career can best be examined through the issues this movie raises. Schroeder once again avoids a moral viewpoint, instead forcing the viewer to contemplate the necessity of defending the sinister Von Bulow.

Schroeder and screenwriter Nicholas Kazan introduced an offbeat technique borrowed from Billy Wilder: *Reversal Of Fortune* is narrated by the comatose Sunny, who would not in

actuality be aware of the events she is allowed to relate. Thus the film's framework is unreliable; what we're seeing is just another variation on what might be the truth. Ultimately, the film concludes, what must be best cherished in our imperfect legal system are the laws intended to protect those who would seem most culpable.

For his portrayal of Von Bulow, Irons won the Motion Picture Academy's award for Best Actor in 1990. Schroeder was nominated for Best Director, but lost to Kevin Costner and his *Dances With Wolves*. In 1991, Schroeder and longtime companion Bulle Ogier married in a Las Vegas chapel, although Schroeder insisted on also remaining loyal to his mistresses scattered across the globe. They are necessary for his well-being, insists Schroeder, ex-escort to "Happy Hooker" Xaviera Hollander, because sexual passion has a shelf life of about three years.

Schroeder's next directorial assignment was 1992's *Single White Female*. Adapted from John Lutz' novel *SWF Seeks Same*, *Single White Female* is yet another film about compulsion, this time the needs of an emotionally disturbed young woman for the love and attention, and vowed dedication, of her roommate.

Allie (Bridget Fonda) breaks up with her fiance when she discovers that he has recently bedded his ex-wife. She takes in as a roommate Hedy (Jennifer Jason Leigh), who seems fresh and innocent in comparison with the intimidating, hard-bitten city women who had answered her newspaper ad. But Hedy slowly reveals that her mental stability is in flux. By the film's conclusion, the desperate roomie has turned into Michael Myers with breasts, stabbing and slashing her way into anyone who interferes with her goal of merging her hollow life with that of her roommate's. The inevitable showdown, in a darkened basement filled with scary, shadowy places and a tiny, dilapidated elevator, will look familiar to anyone familiar with the slasher genre.

For its predictability and subjugation of emotional logic to mechanical story line, *Single White Female* is Schroeder's least satisfying film. Nevertheless, it is his biggest commercial hit so far. Columbia Pictures had so much faith that they mailed its preview trailers along with Damon Wayan's lame *Mo' Money* in hopes of creating crossover appeal. Schroeder himself questioned their strategy, saying that he had aimed the film at young women. But Columbia's ploy apparently worked, for *Single White Female*, which cost over \$18 million, was a moneymaker for the studio. Only the future will reveal whether Schroeder's subsequent work will embrace the studio blueprint, as have the recent films of Paul Verhoeven, or steadfastly reject the tried and safe in exchange for the mystique of the forbidden.

All of Schroeder's films view life's hopelessness with a mock-comical stance. Whether they introduce self-destructive explorers (*More, The Valley, Maitresse, The Cheaters, Barfly*) or likeable monsters (*General Idi Amin Dada: Autoportrait, Reversal Of Fortune, Single White Female*), Schroeder's movies offer no false hope of redemption, no last minute reprieve. Instead, they point out the futility of ever finding that unexplored region of the brain, or that valley in New Guinea, or that perfect roommate. Once you fathom the answer, the question no longer matters. But why fret about the unattainable when there's worlds to discover between Heaven and Hell, and why not laugh as time runs out?

[*More; The Valley; General Idi Amin Dada: An Autoportrait; Maitresse; Koko, A Talking Gorilla; The Cheaters; Barfly; and Reversal Of Fortune* are all available from Warner Home Video. *Single White Female* is available from Columbia Home Video.]

"Thank You Vedly Much"

by Stephen R. Bissette

The 1982 feature **Amin: The Rise And Fall** (Thorn/EMI Video) is quite a curio. The only fictionalized bio of the notorious Ugandan 70s tyrant, Amin barely surfaced theatrically in the states in grindhouses and the dwindling nabes, looking like another lurid tabloid exploitation pic on the level of, say, Rene Cardona Sr. and Jr.'s **Survive!** and **Guyana, Cult Of The Damned**. True, producer/director Sharad Patel's portrait of Idi Amin doesn't hold a candle to Schroeder's one-of-a-kind **General Idi Amin Dada: Autobiography** (a title evoking both one of Amin's favored vestigial names - there were many, including a fake "Dr." and bogus honorable monikers - as well as the terrifying Dadaist lunacy of Amin's reign.) But it remains a slickly produced and straightforward narrative condensation of the titular Rise and Fall, lent considerable authenticity for being produced in Africa by the Film Corporation of Kenya and directed by a South African filmmaker. Patel even goes so far as to feature, as himself, Denis Hills, one of the few white journalists to have actually survived imprisonment under Amin (with a death sentence hanging over his head, no less, for having written the first book on Amin's bloody regime). Patel presents Amin's story in broad strokes punctuated with officious teletype subtitles stating place and time of significant events and a stern narrator who frames the film with properly authoritative introductory and coda info.

Sandwiched within such "true story" trappings is Joseph Olita as Idi himself, a superficially accurate caricature of the genuine article. Unfortunately, Olita's performance is never terrifying in and of itself, though Idi's actions and their consequences are brutal, Patel and Olita fail to portray the dark power of the man himself (which Schroeder **does** tangibly convey in his Amin film). The horrors of Amin's military reign of terror, from the ruthlessly efficient death squads, "V.I.P. treatments" (machine-gun executions) and "State Research Bureau" (torture and death camps) to the November 1978 war declared upon Uganda by neighboring Tanzania, are vividly sketched with impressive economy. The properly brutal narrative context often carries considerable power, but Amin himself remains a one-dimensional cartoon character whose "thank you, veddy much" becomes a deadpan punchline to the most harrowing passages. We begin to anticipate, rather than dread, his eruptions of temper and lunacy. Early in the proceedings, a British diplomat refers to Amin as an "amazing chap!"; however horrific his actions, he remains just that to us throughout the film.

"I am the world's strongest General...the world's greatest lover...the Conqueror of the British Empire!", he boasts childishly, and Patel's compression of events touches on each (though we never really see, much less grasp, the charisma that made him such a formidable military power). Amin's sexuality is cartoonishly portrayed via a detour with a 17-year-old during a cross-country sportscar rally that ends for Amin when the drive to boff the girl in his back seat becomes overwhelming. Later, he is shown bedding two women while Israeli commandos free the Entebbe hostages the night of July 3, 1976. There is no irony or gravity to the sequence, just as one can only laugh when Amin is informed by a bank manager that Uganda is bankrupt and its currency is valueless: Amin orders

the manager's execution and barks at the hapless fellow's confused associate, "Well, are you going to print more money?" Equally amusing is his attempt to detain fleeing Russian diplomats: "People listen to me, you know," he tells his aide en route to the airport, where he urges the Russian commissioner to reconsider. While the Kremlin is contacted, Amin entertains his fellows with his excruciating accordion playing.

Unfortunately for Patel (and fortunately for the more perverse members of his audience, yours truly included), Amin's bloodier excesses are rendered almost as laughable. In the first few minutes, we glimpse the reported severed heads in his kitchen freezer as well as a visit to the death camp mortuary where Amin eats a strip of flesh cut from the body of an executed Chief Justice (a moment compromised by the visible breathing of the "corpse"). While these are hardly humorous in presentation, neither are they terrifying. We do not feel any fear once Amin's dementia accelerates to the casual murder and butchery of his three wives. As he unveils one of the

dismembered bodies to his family, exclaiming, "Children, you see what happens to bad mommies! Ha ha ha hahaha!", Olita's portrayal of Amin has made him into an ogre in an exotic if contemporary political fairy tale. The only dramatic weight Patel wields is tempered by the distance Olita's caricature and the necessary telescoping of events imposes - we remain aware throughout that what is depicted indeed occurred, but can only respond emotionally to the alternately flat-footed and flamboyant melodrama of their presentation. Amin's most explicit act of on-screen mayhem - the February 1977 murder of Archbishop Janana Luwum after being kidnapped and beaten by Amin's police - is momentarily bracing: screaming "Stop

hiding behind your white collar, you impotent bastard! Idi Amin is God!", he empties a revolver into the bruised priest's mouth. Yet Olita's delivery of Amin's childish retort, "I lost my temper! I killed the Archbishop!", is hilarious. While credible, Olita's performance becomes risibly endearing; Amin's genuine atrocities dwarf those invented for an imaginary boogeyman like Hannibal Lecter, but Patel and Olita do not **once** approach the ominous cinematic presence Demme and Hopkins brought to Thomas Harris' beautifully crafted confection. Given the reality of the Ugandan dictator's legacy, we may feel guilt laughing at this cinematic Amin. But the failure that prompts our laughter lies in the film, not our moral sensibilities.

When Amin escapes in the sadly true-to-life anticlimax, Patel clearly intends us to feel teeth-grinding rage and despair at the madman's ability to elude justice in this lifetime after killing over half a million people. We are not (as we should be) angry and horrified - we're almost relieved that this deranged teddy-bear caricature has, like Bugs Bunny or the Checkered Demon, eluded his victims to pop up again in another sicko live-action cartoon. Forget about **The Killing Fields** or **JFK**, much less **General Idi Amin Dada: Autobiography** or former Ugandan Cabinet Minister Henry Kyemba's chilling account of Amin's regime, **A State Of Blood** (published while Amin was still in power: 1977, Paddington Press/Ace) - this is one political horror movie that, despite the filmmaker's heartfelt intentions, sadly trivializes rather than dramatizes the torturous realities of one of this century's most bizarre and devastating military dictatorships.



Sex and the Psycho Killer

At some point in the mid-sixties, after thrill-seeking filmmakers had turned their backs on nudist camp dramas and joyless "comedies" with semi-naked women and infantile men stumbling their way through clumsy routines, movie producers searched for a new angle with which they could lure customers back to the theater without being run out of town by bluenosed church groups and aspiring politicians. The addition of franker sexual content was (at least initially) out of the question, but the independent studio bosses and roadshow men soon learned that adding explicit violence wasn't as likely to stir up local police or anti-pornography groups.

If not the first, David F. Friedman's **The Defilers** was one of the best of the early attempts to mix a serious plot with realistic violence and peek-a-boo nude footage. Friedman's sadomasochistic spectacle broke boxoffice records, as did several of its imitators. Adult theaters were soon awash in a sea of violent nudies, soon dubbed "roughies" by exhibitors (as in, "Jeezus, that's rough!"). Degenerates, rapists and murderers haunted the shadows of these low-life tableaux of victimization and depravity.

In roughies, sex and violence were commonly equated; the combination was less taboo than in these times. "The sicker, the better" seemed to be the genre's unofficial slogan, although the ads frequently promised a more shocking film than what was actually screened. Film quality mattered little, for adult features were seldom booked longer than one week. Patrons accepted that one visit may yield an exceptional feature such as **The Defilers**, while a subsequent visit might turn up a laughable Dale Berry ineptitude. Such disparity is observed in comparing two films about sex killers.

Adultery, prostitution, murder, castration, and necrophilia all figure into the script of Cambist Films' 1968 feature **Aroused** (Something Weird Video), a potent blend of softcore porn and urban crime melodrama. The latter is ultimately favored, for at its heart **Aroused** is a nightmarish cine-poem masquerading as a skin flick. It's also one of the most technically accomplished exploitation films ever made, recalling the surreal cityscapes of the experimental fifties film **Daughter Of Horror** while foreshadowing the lurid "slasher" movies of the late seventies.

Aroused revolves around the efforts of Johnny (Steve Hollister), a young New York City cop, to track down a killer necrophile who preys on the hooker habits of a seedy bar called The Clan. Johnny is aided in his search by Ginny (Janine Lenon), a hard-as-nails chippie who was the lesbian lover of the killer's most recent victim. The more Johnny frequents The Clan, the more intimate he becomes with the vengeful Ginny, who has sworn to castrate her girlfriend's murderer. When the killer's identity is realized, he's hunted down by both cops and whores. The violent conclusion recalls Fritz Lang's **M** without sharing its merciful deliverance.

The uncanny effectiveness of **Aroused** seems to be the result of a synergic collaboration between director/co-writer Anton Holden, director of photography Gideon Zumbach, cameraman Bob Morton, and exterior photographer (and producer) Ray Jenkins. One of this team's inspired decisions was to set the entire film at night, enshrouding the grim proceedings in a blanket of darkness and despair. Jenkins' magnificent exteriors, urban city-scapes of back-lit iron railings and seedy storefronts doused with neon, are startling in their unexpected beauty. With their emphasis on depth and degree of angle, the interior compositions of Zumbach and Morton, many meticulously composed with chiaroscuro lighting effects, are equally impressive. One outstandingly photographed segment juxtaposes the background image of the killer's horrific suffocation murder of a hooker against a foreground composed of the woman's high-heel bedroom slipper. Another follows the film's cop hero down a pitch-black elevator shaft in a frantic effort to save the life of a woman trapped inside with the killer.

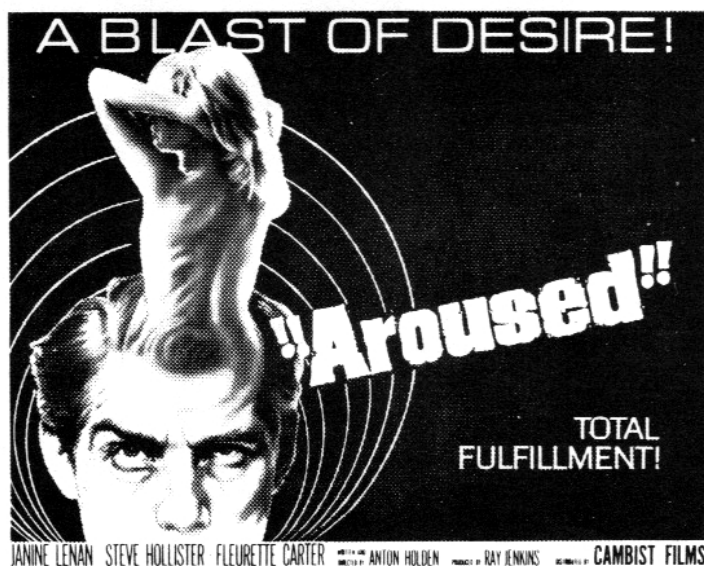
Further evidence of creative teamwork is revealed during the film's murder sequences, as the image and soundtrack suddenly freeze and give way to aural snippets from the killer's tortured childhood. While we listen to cruelties inflicted on the young boy by his prostitute mother and her brutish tricks, we're forced to contemplate a visual still-life of the destructive legacy of child abuse. But perhaps the most impressive visual set-piece is of a hooker's (Fleurette Carter) long, dizzying stroll down neon-lit Big Apple streets as bait for the killer's bloodlust. Jenkin's gravity-free camera drunkenly twirls about her as the soundtrack melts into a cacophony of catcalls, traffic noise, and Edmund Mitchel's red-hot jazz score. It's a beautiful marriage

of content and image unequalled in most adult cinema.

Upon its New York premiere, **Aroused** was cited by **Variety** as having been made "...with care and quality unusual to the genre." They also noted that film industry majors had expressed interest in Holden's career, but that he was currently in the midwest working on a film to be called **In Virginia's Room**. It never materialized, but Holden did direct the 1968 feature **Cargo Of Love** for Jerry Abrams. The violent tale of a band of depraved white slavers, **Cargo Of Love** is reportedly a no-budget exercise in

tedium that betrays the promise the filmmaker displayed with **Aroused**. Holden then seems to have disappeared from filmmaking entirely.

Too bad, for - despite the impressive contributions of the rest of the team - **Aroused** bears the multi-talented Holden's stamp (Holden, along with soon-to-be independent filmmaker Mark Rappaport of **Impostors** fame, even co-edited). Still, despite Holden's failure to replicate its artistic and commercial success, **Aroused** looms as a classic of the softcore sex film, a rare instance where a tawdry, off-kilter tale is told with the expressive cinematic language of filmmakers whose creativity is equalled only by their ambition.



Not so the gory 1972 *Evil Come, Evil Go* (Luna Video), a poorly-made tale of religious fanaticism, fucking, and murder from porn producer/director Bob Chinn (*Baby Cakes*). Though far more graphic in its depictions of both sexual hijinks and mutilation, *Evil Come, Evil Go* is not nearly as engaging as Holden's film from four years earlier. This is unfortunate, for the premise of Chinn's softcore horror flick would have made a great metaphor for the ravages of puritanism...in another movie.

Sister Sarah Jane Butler (Cleo O'Hara in the credits, but I smell a pseudonym) is Aimee Semple McPherson with a butcher knife, a man-hating religious fanatic whose role in life, she has discerned, is to put an end to fornication by killing the "evil" men who partake of illicit pleasure. She hits Hollywood, seducing and then hacking apart every man who's tempted by her ample charms. In her wake she leaves puddles of gore and a lipstick-scrawled message: "God is love, not sex." This "hymn-humming hellcat" is soon joined in her quest by Penny (Sandra Henderson), a wealthy young lesbian who renounces her sinful life by helping Sister Sarah Jane kill her butch lover. Penny becomes bait for Sarah Jane's man-traps as the two women cut a bloody swath across the Hollywood landscape.

It is tempting for contemporary viewers to see Sister Sarah Jane as a metaphor for today's charlatans and rabid bible-beaters who have declared war against an ill-perceived "cultural elite," but writer/director Walt Davis (*Substitution*) avoids any such indictments by fashioning his fundamentalist femme fatale after typical horror movie psychopaths. Religion is merely Sister Jane's m.o.; in no way can she be seen to represent a movement beyond the support of her lone disciple. Her crusade is merely the gimmick that precipitates the removal of clothing and the gleeful spraying of stage blood.

In addition to the film's thematic problems, *Evil Come, Evil Go* is technically mundane. The cinematography, which can most charitably be described as being of the "point and shoot" variety, was furnished by veteran exploitation distributor Manuel S. Conde. Virtually every opportunity to enhance the film with technical innovation, or even steady craftsmanship, has been missed. Davis' script, which lacks any sense of suspense or tension throughout, simply fades away at the film's finale. It's a brazen testament to his and Chinn's indifference to their project.

Evil Come, Evil Go appeared when hardcore porn was supplanting the less explicit variety, and Davis was clearly aware of the competition. Full-frontal nude scenes and "beaver" shots illustrate the desperation of softcore filmmakers trying to hold their own against the insurmountable attraction of early hardcore. Indeed, porn star Rick Cassidy has a prominent role as a body builder who runs afoul of the man-hating harpies, and the late John Holmes shoots pool in one brief scene. As Sarah Jane, O'Hara sorely avoids the understatement that would have made the character more believable: her deranged evangelist is about as subtle as Princess Dragon Mom from *Inframan*. Director Davis appears briefly as a pig farmer, a casting coup which I'll refrain from commenting upon.

Perhaps I'm being too harsh on a film made during the decline of the softcore era, but the most damning fault of *Evil Come, Evil Go* is that it contains the germ of a bracing sexploitation concept without ever following through. As such, it's a deserved obscurity that will achieve its greatest impact as another Luna Video rip-off of unsuspecting consumers who accept the box artwork's promise of a contemporary release.

[Aroused is available for \$23.00 postpaid from Something Weird Video, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133. *Evil Come, Evil Go* can be found in many non-Blockbuster video rental chains.]



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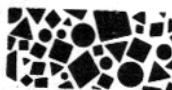
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The Wild World Of Doug Hobart

Part Two

[ECCO #17 traced Florida actor/makeup-man Doug Hobart's unusual career in the fringes of show business, from his childhood fascination with theatrical make-up to his appearance as "the monster" in two of William Grefe's low-budget horror movies. At the conclusion of Part One, Hobart, who was known in his Ohio hometown as "the Monster of Curtis Street," was promoting a tawdry exploitation film entitled *The Weird World Of LSD* as if it were a solemn treatise on the actual dangers posed by the use of acid. He managed to hoodwink college deans across the country into helping him promote a film made by owners of burlesque halls and adult movie theaters.]

Having made money for Americana Entertainment with their incoherent *The Weird World Of LSD* (1967), Hobart's mercenary salesmanship was suddenly in demand. He was

approached by fellow Floridian K. Gordon Murray, the ex-carny who had made a fortune importing and dubbing cheaply-made children's films from Mexico and Germany for kiddie matinee fodder that played for years throughout the U.S. Through his acquaintance with Murray, Hobart met legendary film huckster Kroger Babb, *Blood Feast* producer David F. Friedman, skin flick auteur Barry Mahon, burlesque theatre owner and nude film producer Leroy Griffith, and other luminaries of the low-budget movie industry. "Murray wanted me to promote several of his old horror movies as a roadshow package for drive-ins," Hobart recalls, "and I got the idea to use an old 'spook show' gimmick to help them along." Hobart toured Murray's film vault, where he was handed stacks of 16mm film reels. After a marathon 24-hour screening at his home, Hobart selected a double bill of *The Curse Of The Doll People* and *The Vampire*. He then devised an ad campaign which promised "a psychedelic trip into the 5th dimension," but wisely avoided mentioning that the two films in question were black and white, English-dubbed Mexican horror melodramas that were badly dated and tame by current standards. And Hobart's spiel continued, promising the hopeful that they would witness "...the undead awaken after 200 years, from beyond the grave into the audience." The "undead," of course, was none other than Doug Hobart with fangs and a cape. From Florida to Louisiana, Hobart crept car to car across drive-in lots, distributing a drink dubbed the "Blood Cocktail, from the vampire's blood bank." Along with Hobart's vampire act, the lurid libation (tomato juice with food coloring) helped soothe the tempers of drive-in patrons who had paid to see twenty-year-old movies that had long ago been resigned to the wasteland of late-night television.

Later that year, Hobart dusted off the technique he had used to promote *The Weird World Of LSD* and hit the circuit with *Santa Claus*, Murray's widely seen 1960 import from Mexican

director Rene Cardona. This time, Hobart targeted Catholic schools as his unwitting accomplices. "We've got a terrible problem, sisters," Hobart would gravely intone to the nuns who had been entrusted with the spiritual development of holy matrimony's tender fruit. "Hollywood is at war against children's films, and their victory will mean the end of movies that families can attend together." At this the nuns recognized Hobart as their ally in the fight against smut and the dissolution of the family unit. "Go see any movie playing in town," he continued, "and you'll see that what's popular today is too degrading for the eyes and ears of young children." Yes, the "Catholic Standard and Times" had recently decried this moral menace to youth. Imagine hooded heads nodding in unison as Hobart proposed a solution to Hollywood's appalling indifference to what had not yet been tagged "family values." "If we're going to send a message to Hollywood that the public demands children's films, we need your assistance." By now the nuns were ready to die for Hobart. "Be sure to tell your classes about *Santa Claus*, a clean, wholesome motion picture

made especially for the enjoyment of children and their parents." As Hobart now recalls, "I passed out the leaflets and the nuns were more than happy to do it!" When *Santa Claus* opened, Hobart's duotone dupes were no doubt dismayed to discover that a devil was a major character in the film.

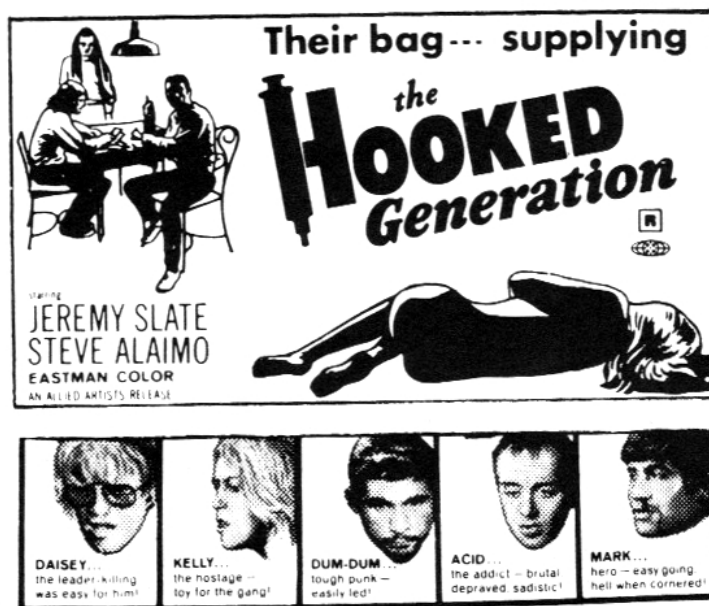
A phone call from Bill Grefe the following year led to Hobart working on *The Hooked Generation*, a tale of drug smugglers set in and around the Everglades. Hobart created makeup for the result of a speargun killing: the actor appears to be pinned to a chair by a spear through his chest. Along with the spear effect, Hobart also devised a retractable needle for a junkie's syringe. But his participation in making *The Hooked Generation* ended with another phone call, this time from



Grefe's partner on *Sting Of Death*, Joe Fink. "George (Roberts), Eli (Jackson), and me are making a stock car movie. We're wondering if you wanted in." Hobart explained that he was working on Grefe's film. "Is there any way you can get out of it?," Fink persisted. "No, I don't think so," Hobart responded. But Fink wouldn't give up. "Doug, when you find out who's in this picture you're going to want to be over here...Lon Chaney, Jr." There was no hesitation from Hobart as he blurted "I'm on my way over!" "See," Hobart explains, "I wanted to work with Lon in the worst way. I had always wanted to meet him."

Americana Entertainment's *Fireball Jungle* (Sinister Cinema) was a fictitious "expose" of a ruthless criminal racket muscling their way into the lucrative racing field. *Fireball Jungle* is notable for its direction by exploitation vet Jose Prieto, an expatriate Cuban who had worked with Irving Klaw, and for its status as the last film of Lon Chaney, Jr. before his fatal heart attack in 1973. (It isn't. The ailing actor appeared in Al Adamson's *Dracula Vs Frankenstein* the following year.) Chaney excelled as a drunken junkyard attendant, adding a touch of pathos to what would have otherwise been a throwaway caricature. Aging ex-matinee idol John Russell from television's *The Lawman* was the ruthless crime lord eager to force his way into the race car racket. Hobart, of course, handled the film's make-up requirements. Along with routine stage blood applications, he devised several unusual make-up designs such as a checkerboard pattern painted on a nude woman's face and torso, and the horrifying simulation of Lon Chaney, Jr.'s fiery demise inside a burning shack. The latter was accomplished by torching a life-size replica of the actor. Piano wire attached to the dummy's arms was tugged from offscreen, causing the flaming torso to convulse hideously.

As Hobart had hoped, he and Chaney became fast friends on the set. One day Chaney turned to him and remarked, "Doug, you do makeup like my father did." Hobart was stunned by the comparison until Chaney finished his thought. "You still use greasepaint and nose putty, all those old techniques, just like Dad." But Hobart had told Chaney of his painstaking and painful six-hour make-up application for his appearances as the Wolf Man. To effect the broadened nose of a werewolf, Hobart stuffed rubber tubing up his nostrils. Chaney's revered father had once worn painful wire clamps inside his mouth to distort his face for a grotesque characterization. The son was impressed by this easy-going Floridian whose dedication to his craft recalled the halcyon years of Chaney Sr. Through a handshake



agreement, Hobart became the make-up artist for Chaney's next movie project, a sci-fi thriller to be called *The Gila Man*. Chaney himself had arranged financing for the film, and had also been assured of the participation of his friend John Carradine. But cancer sapped Chaney of the strength to continue before the project had gone beyond the planning stage, and Hobart watched his dream of working for a childhood idol sink just as Tartu had disappeared beneath the vermiculite quicksand.

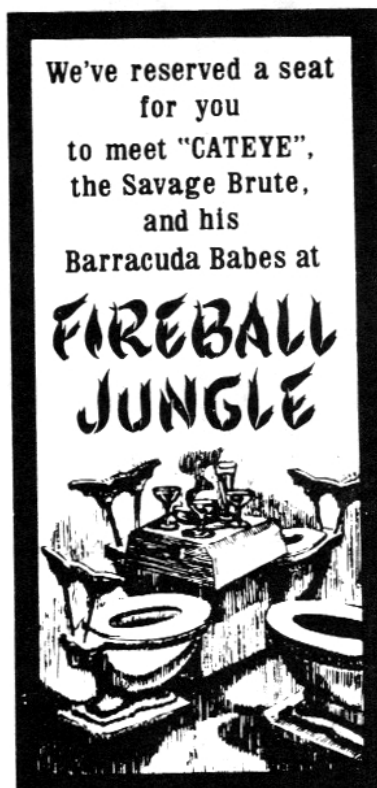
After the quick shoot for *Fireball Jungle*, Hobart returned to handle publicity for *The Hooked*

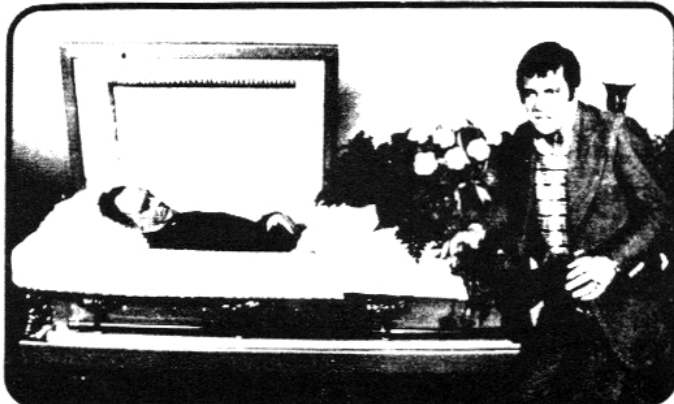
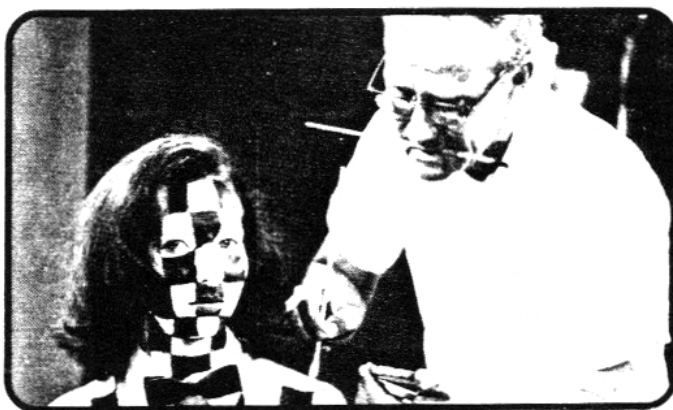
Generation, including touring with it as he had with K. Gordon Murray's double bill. Together, he and Grefe concocted an outrageously mercenary promotional stunt. They bought several cases of empty gelatin capsules from a medical supply house and stuffed them with tiny, folded-up heralds which proclaimed the following:

"Open this capsule and get the DOPE on *The Hooked Generation*! Coming to your local theatre! The most controversial action-packed motion picture ever made on today's youth! Don't miss *The Hooked Generation*, starring Jeremy Slate and Steve Alaimo!"

Hobart stuffed the clear capsules so that the word DOPE was prominently displayed, and then hit the road ahead of the film's various playdates. Arriving several days before the film was to open, Hobart would fling handfuls of the "pills" into as many schoolyards as he could find. They were discovered and opened by students, who invariably showed the enclosed herald to their friends. This scheme led to word-of-mouth publicity that helped *The Hooked Generation* compete against slicker teen fare at rival theaters. On his extensive promotional tour for *The Hooked Generation*, Hobart was accompanied by one of the film's stars. To his dismay, Hobart discovered that the actor actually was strung out on drugs and in the throes of an emotional breakdown. Upon arriving at his charge's hotel room the night before a scheduled press conference in Norfolk, Virginia, Hobart found the man surrounded by pieces of the bathroom sink, which he was fervently disassembling. The distraught actor fled to the airport early the following morning, leaving Hobart to face the reporters alone.

After the tour, Hobart returned to the Miami area and was offered a job by Joe Fink and Eli Jackson of Americana Entertainment as "checker" for their movie theaters. Without warning, Hobart would walk into theaters, check the financial records, and then fire any manager whose honesty was in question. Once a manager had been dismissed, Hobart would remain in town long enough to hire a replacement who was presumably more honest





than his predecessor. At Americana's request, Hobart also toured carnivals with a "Girl Into Gorilla" show. This old carry gag, which is literally done with mirrors, remains a staple on America's few remaining midways.

While working for Americana, Hobart was once again contacted by K. Gordon Murray, who was producing another film by Jose Prieto. Prieto had previously directed the "adults only" shocker **Shanty Tramp** for Murray's Trans International Films. That controversial film, in which a sharecropper's amoral daughter accuses an honest young black man of rape, had been too strong for many communities, particularly in the race-conscious South. This follow-up feature was to be aimed at the teenage audiences who had flocked to see Roger Corman's **The Wild Angels**. Prieto's biker knockoff was filmed as **Big Enough 'N Old Enough**, though it would later be re-released as **Savages From Hell** (Something Weird Video). Hobart was hired as the film's production manager and location scout. "I went to one of those areas down there that's mostly redneck, and they didn't want nothin' to do with that picture," Hobart recalls of one experience while searching for locations near Florida's Everglades. "These people wore guns and knives in broad daylight! So when they said, 'Don't bother with this town,' I knew I had to find another area."

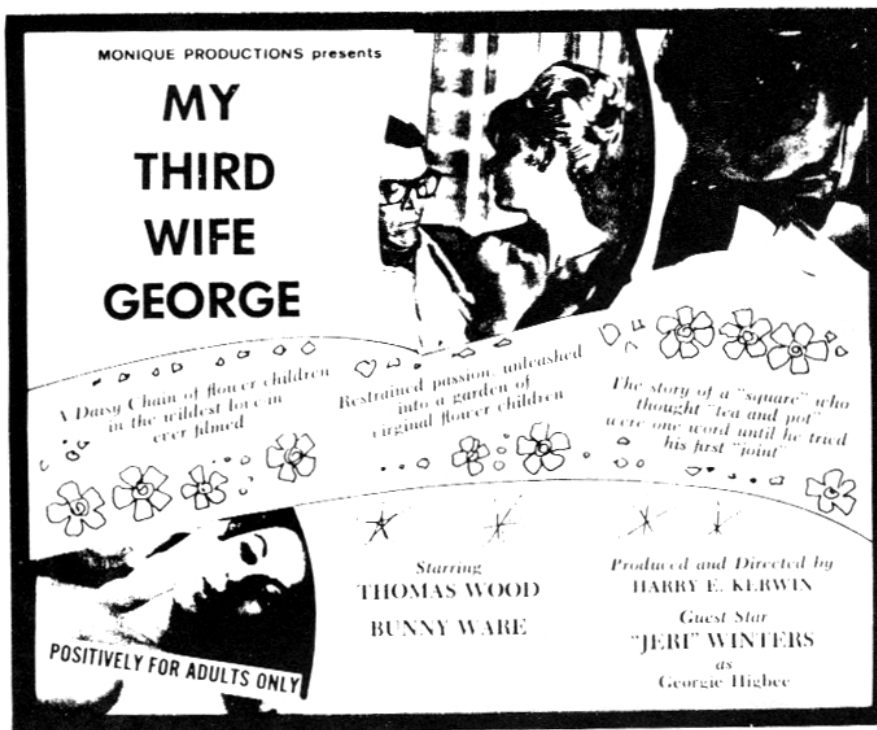
So he could put a famous last name on theatre marquees, Murray cast Sidney Poitier's less-talented brother Cyril in a supporting role. Bill Kelly, Doug Hobart's old partner on the werewolf attraction, starred as the heavy, a brutal biker named High Test. Bobbie Byers, who had helped sell tickets to William Greife's **Wild Rebels** the previous year, was High Test's slutty (but vengeful) mama. And when the actor hired to portray the deputy sheriff failed to arrive, Murray turned to Hobart, handed him the absent actor's outfit, and said, "Here, see if these will fit you." The costume fit Hobart reasonably

well. "O.K.," Murray told him, "you're the new deputy sheriff." And that is how Doug Hobart was deputized by the king of the kiddie matinee.

For the years 1969 and 1970, Hobart only worked on two films. The first was Joseph Adler's **Scream Baby Scream** (1969/Regal Video, deleted). Adler, who had directed the obscure **Fun Lovers** (video title: **Sex And The College Girl**) in 1964, contacted Hobart on a recommendation from mutual friend Tom Casey, the Florida filmmaker responsible for the transvestite murder thriller **Sometimes Aunt Martha Does Dreadful Things**. Adler's **Scream Baby Scream** is the story of a mad artist whose "abstract" portraits are actually the realistic depictions of models whose faces have been rearranged through the injection of a powerful serum. "The first guy we hired for make-up was recommended because he could do prosthetics," recalls Adler, "but the results didn't have the look we wanted. But Doug immediately solved our problems." Besides the prerequisite gore, Hobart created elaborate make-up designs for the artist's grotesquely disfigured victims. "The make-up was a collaboration, but Doug brought a lot to the party," adds Adler. "He had some definite thoughts right from the start. Unfortunately, with our low budget and time restrictions (the film was shot in twelve days), he didn't have the ability to run wild with some of his ideas." Hobart also played the role of the "little ghoul with the horrible face" who serves as henchman for the crazed artist. Asked for a personal remembrance of Hobart as actor and make-up artist, Adler recalls him as being "a pleasure to work with."

Flesh Feast (World Video, deleted), a 1970 horror feature touting the return of forties' screen siren Veronica Lake, was the brainchild of producer/director, screenwriter/playwright, actor and avowed nudist/swinger F. Brad Grinter. A man not well loved by a number of his contemporaries, Grinter was notorious for such seams as offering a course on filmmaking so he could use the students' tuition to finance the film **Devil Rider**, and then callously offer the students course credits, but not pay, for their participation as extras. When asked how he met Grinter, Hobart is not certain. "It may have been through Rooney (aka Bill) Kerwin. But in those days, everybody knew everybody else and they all hired one another, too. That's really how the Florida film industry started."





at Studio City in North Miami Beach. As set designers, Hobart and Kelly were required to create a set suggesting the interior of a Chinese junk; the exterior was furnished by stock footage Mahon had bought from a travelog company. Honoring the practice of using pseudonyms in the credits of "adult" movies, Hobart credited himself as Douglas Blake.

"Blake's" next project was a nude comedy. **My Third Wife George** (1971) was produced by Leroy Griffith for his Monique Productions. Griffith, who was married to Joy Hodges of **Bell, Bare and Beautiful** fame, owned over a dozen adult movie theatres and burlesque houses throughout the Miami area, and was an occasional business partner of Americana's Eli Jackson (who was married to

Flesh Feast is prime Grinter, a stupefying concoction of grotesque horror and half-baked philosophy served up with shoddy cinematography, amateurish or indifferent acting, and the ambience of a skid-row blood bank's waiting room. Veronica Lake portrays a famous plastic surgeon whose mother had been tortured and killed by the Nazis. Her latest surgical innovation involves using live maggots to strip away wrinkled or diseased tissue to make room for new skin growth. A mysterious patient from Argentina arrives at her Miami laboratory accompanied with armed bodyguards, demanding that he be given her new treatment. The stranger, who is apparently the spearhead of a new revolutionary movement, turns out to be none other than Adolph Hitler himself. **Flesh Feast** concludes with Lake strapping Der Fuehrer to an operating table and then dumping a bucketful of hungry maggots onto the old Nazi's face as he screams for help.

Through his responsibilities for **Flesh Feast**, Doug Hobart added another skill to his ever-expanding resume: maggot breeder. Doug tossed raw hamburger meat into a garbage can behind his house and waited for results. Several days later, he discovered several dozen non-union actors writhing about in the decaying crud. For their big scene, Hobart glued monofilament wire onto several of the maggots, and then attached the wires underneath the facial makeup of Otto Schlesinger, the actor portraying Hitler. The effect was sickening: the wired maggots appeared to be burrowing into Schlesinger's face. The remaining larvae were portrayed by grains of cooked rice, but the nervous Schlesinger insisted that the living bugs be inventoried before and after the scene was filmed.

Hobart next worked on the 1971 nude feature **The Love Pirate** for skin flick king Barry Mahon, who had relocated his operations to the Miami region as a respite from the colder environs of New York City. Along with Bill Kelly, Hobart designed the sets for what was Mahon's most ambitious nude. **The Love Pirate** starred **Flesh Feast** director Brad Grinter as Captain Fu, an evil pirate of the China Sea who kidnaps the daughter of a rich merchant. Viewers who couldn't follow the melodramatic plot were probably too busy checking out Fu's all-female crew, who tended to doff their clothes at the drop of a Jolly Roger. Though set on the China Seas, **The Love Pirate** was filmed

stripper Virginia "Ding Dong" Bell, also from **Bell, Bare and Beautiful**. On the recommendation of Bill Kerwin, the film's star, Griffith hired Hobart to play Kerwin's wheelchair-bound mother!

Although the "old lady" make-up was of little challenge to Hobart, the role was more demanding than it had initially seemed. For one scene, he agreed to be pushed in the wheelchair into a swimming pool, and to then remain seated underwater. Recalling his **Sting Of Death** days, Hobart



astonished the film crew with his ability to hold his breath for several minutes at a time. "Don't worry, that's Doug Hobart," Bill Kerwin reassured an anxious extra.

Later that year, Hobart was re-enlisted by Bill Grefe, who had managed to sign former leading lady Rita Hayworth for his next feature, **The Grove**. Besides handling the film's effects, Hobart served as assistant to the producer. His son Chuck handled the props for the film, and both Bills, Kerwin and Kelly, were given minor roles. Ex-Peyton Place regular Stephen Oliver, who appeared in **Werewolves On Wheels** the same year, portrayed Terry Shaw, an egocentric writer who uses his freewheeling reputation to seduce women at LSD parties in Miami's fashionable Coconut Grove community. Hayworth was Mrs. Golden, Oliver's sugar mama, who is screwing him under the nose of her invalid husband (Ford Rainey). When the older man discovers the truth and is killed in the ensuing scuffle, Hayworth attempts to blackmail the promiscuous Oliver for his devoted affection. But the ruthless young writer retaliates with a cruel plot, leading to a fatal freeze-frame finale.

The cast of **The Grove** also included ex-prizefighter Willie Pastrano, who had also appeared in several of Grefe's previous features, as well as actress Fay Spain and, in a cameo appearance, comedian Joe E. ("Ooh, ooh!") Ross. This was Grefe's best cast so far, and Hobart was thrilled to be working with Hayworth. "She was the most beautiful thing that I ever laid my eyes on," he recalls. But the sex siren from **Gilda** was then undergoing the onset of Alzheimer's disease, and frequently had difficulty remembering her lines.

Although **The Grove** was one of Grefe's better movies, the results from initial test screenings were disheartening. Eager to recoup their costs, the backers sold it to R&S Film Enterprises, who changed the title to **The Naked Zoo** and hired Barry Mahon to make the film more commercially appealing. Mahon, who had by then added "rock concert" movies with Grand Funk Railroad and Iron Butterfly to his nudie repertoire, shot an embarrassing party scene featuring the hippie band Canned Heat. He also inserted scenes of a nude woman sprawled on a bed, caressing her body with a hand-held vibrator as she supposedly talks to the Terry Shaw character on the phone.

"I didn't appreciate it," Hobart states emphatically. "I was at a theatrical showing and all of a sudden...Bingo!, I find out that Barry Mahon had put some scenes in it that I'd never seen before, because I saw the original picture without them. I don't object to nude scenes, but there's absolutely no reason for them in this movie." Apparently Hobart wasn't the only one taken aback by the nude footage. "I'll tell you one thing," he adds,

MIDNIGHT SHOW!

UNCUT! UNCENSORED!

RATED **R** BARELY


THE ORIGINAL STAGE PRODUCTION NOW ON THE SCREEN

"LEAVES THE AUDIENCE IN STITCHES"
— Kitty Oliver, Miami Herald

"COMPLETE NUILITY FINDS A PLACE ON FLORIDA STAGE"
— Steve Ruediger, Tampa Tribune

IN COLOR

BARELY PROPER



"Rita Hayworth was upset as hell about it. And I don't blame her. It's just not a Rita Hayworth vehicle that way!" Director Grefe concurred, and avoided showings of **The Naked Zoo** after hearing of Mahon's "improvements."

After the disappointment of **The Naked Zoo**, Doug Hobart worked as a collections agent for the J. Burns department store chain until Grefe called in 1974 with a project tentatively titled **Want A Ride, Little Girl?** The star was none other than William Shatner, the former Captain Kirk of t.v.'s **Star Trek**. Shatner was joined by a slumming Ruth Roman and by Harold "Oddjob" Sakata of **Goldfinger** fame. Matt Stone (Shatner) is tormented by childhood memories of killing his prostitute mother's abusive trick (Bill Kerwin again). The recollection eventually unhinges Stone, who becomes the crazed murderer of women unlucky enough to remind him of Mom. When a young girl witnesses Shatner's cold-blooded killing of blackmailer Sakata, she becomes his next target.

Along with serving as Associate Producer, Hobart handled the make-up and appeared as an embalmed corpse in a mortuary scene. He remembers Shatner as friendly and outgoing, unlike his image in the tabloids. "He wasn't the 'I'm a star, so don't touch me' type, not at all. If he had been, I wouldn't have worked with him. I've always figured that everyone puts their pants on the same way I do." Shatner impressed other cast members, particularly Marcy Lafferty (the amorous desk clerk who spends the night with Matt Stone at a no-tell motel). Shortly after filming, she and Shatner were wed.

Prior to release, Grefe changed the title, which seemed to suggest child molestation, to **Impulse** (IVE Entertainment). It received a respectable release, but nevertheless proved to be the last gasp for its distributors, Conqueror Films, who closed shop soon afterwards. Desperate executives at Conqueror four-walled **Impulse**, sending Hobart out on the road with Harold Sakata to publicize it with personal appearances at shopping-centers and interviews on local talk shows. Fortunately for Hobart, Sakata left the hotel plumbing intact.

NEVER the TWAIN



HER HUSBANDS' SPIRIT POSSESSED by that of Mark Twain at the Miss Nude World Pageant

90 MINUTES of SUSPENSE

STARRING
ED TROSTLE
as himself and Mark Twain
RICHARD WEBB as himself
and **KATHY WELDON**

Filmed on location at the MISS NUDE WORLD PAGEANT of 1974

R

Later that year, Hobart listened to an intriguing proposition from his old employer Joseph Fink. Under Fink's plan, Hobart would become his partner in a new film company that specialized in buying cheaply-made films which had performed poorly at the boxoffice and re-releasing them with flashy, sure-fire campaigns. After all, if Hobart could make money with a piece of crap like **The Weird World Of LSD**, reasoned Fink, he could turn a profit with anything. Their prospective headquarters was to be centered in Atlanta, a "hub" location for southern film distribution. But the plan ended with Fink's untimely death. After the funeral, Hobart accepted a job trying to salvage a low-budget action film for Fink's ex-partner in Thunderbird International Pictures, Juan Hidalgo-Gato. **Road Of Death** (1974) was a

threadbare obscurity (try to find it in a reference book) starring porn star Carol Connors. Hobart's challenge was to provide the semblance of a plot through the use of voice overdubs. But if a film could actually be worse than Americana's LSD opus, this was it. To this day, Hobart winces when the title is mentioned.

Barely Proper (1975) was an R-rated nudist camp "dramedy" from the irrepressible F. Brad Grinter. Hobart was hired for special make-up ("mostly body painting," he says) and to design the film's campaign. **Barely Proper** was released briefly, but soon disappeared in a morass of more explicit - and better made - adult films. Hobart later handled promotion for Grinter's follow-up, the bizarre **Never The Twain** (1975), which premiered in Oklahoma City for a test date...and then died. (See **HIGHBALL #1** for more on Grinter.) With these films, Hobart began to accept that the market for low-budget films had changed. Audiences were more sophisticated, their expectations higher from the relaxing of standards for major motion pictures. The independents could no longer claim to offer stronger subject matter than the majors, and the public voted with their purchase of tickets for which they preferred. It was the beginning of the end for low-budget exploitation.

Hobart could also see that his make-up techniques were dated. With **The Exorcist** (1973), Dick Smith had taken the role of the make-up artist to a higher realm. Advanced prosthetics had extended the role of the make-up artist from theatrical craftsman to engineer. "I would have had to go back to school," Hobart recalls, "which wasn't much of an option at the time. I had a family to support." Hobart's final hurrah as a low-budget Lon Chaney occurred later that year.

Robert W. Morgan was an adventurer and occasional soldier of fortune who was also keenly interested in unexplained phenomena. Along with directing several

pseudo-documentaries, Morgan led a group of fellow mercenaries on the so-called American Yeti Expedition. Their safari failed to produce a yeti, but the search gave Morgan an idea for a horror film.

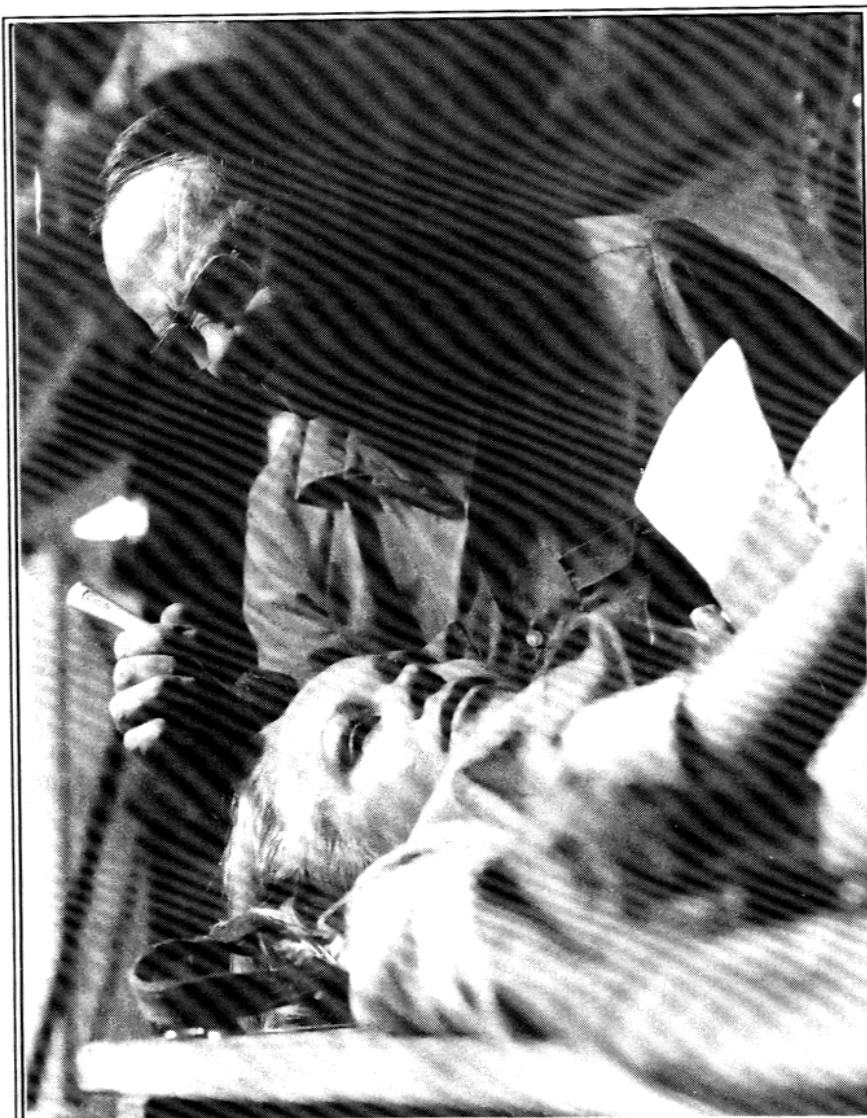
The diehard documentary director had noted the boxoffice draw of 1973's **The Legend Of Boggy Creek**, Charles B. Pierce's low-budget excursion into fact-based fiction about an Arkansas swamp monster. The year before Morgan had observed the runaway success of Tobe Hooper's **The Texas**

Chainsaw

Massacre, which like his documentaries had been shot inexpensively on 16mm film. "What if," Morgan wondered, "the two films were crossed?" **The Night Daniel Died** (1975) was his answer.

The Night Daniel Died chronicled the fate of two couples from New York who vacation in rural Florida (Ft. Lauderdale, actually) at the abandoned summer cabin one of the men has inherited from his deceased parents. Undeterred by local stories of murderous swamp monsters, the group occupies the cabin. There they discover the secret of the legend, but too late.

"That was a six-gallon picture," claims Hobart, who designed the film's grisly special effects. "I used to buy my stage blood in Coral Gables, Florida, and I recall picking up at least six gallons." **The Night Daniel Died** starred former teen



Hobart touches up a victim in the gory swamp thriller **Bloodstalkers**.

heartthrob Kenny Miller (profiled in **FILMFAX #37**) as an insecure actor, as well as regular character actors from the films of Bill Grefe and Herschell Lewis. Indeed, the strong cast helped compensate for the film's obviously impoverished budget.

The Night Daniel Died bombed until the distributors re-released it as **Bloodstalkers** (Vidmark Entertainment). "They did quite a business with it under that title," Hobart recalls. His most persistent memory of the shoot is director Morgan trying to convince him to join his adventurer's club, which was planning a parachute jump into the jungles of the Amazon. Hobart's succinct reply: "hell, no!"

Shortly after **Bloodstalkers**, Hobart was hired by Palmetto Pictures, the Miami Springs outfit that had backed **Sometimes Aunt Martha Does Dreadful Things**. Palmetto had co-produced with Mundial Pictures of Spain a gruesome horror film by producer/director Manuel Cano entitled **The Swamp Of The Ravens**. "It was a hell of a picture," Hobart recalls. (In an early fanzine, Fred Olen Ray raved about attending a screening of the film arranged by Hobart.) Confident that **Swamp Of The Ravens** would be a boxoffice winner, Hobart worked up a deal to present to sub-distributors Paragon Films. Unexpectedly, they turned him down. Their refusal of a film that Hobart realized was superior to most drive-in fodder was more than he could tolerate. He angrily put the industry behind him.

Drawing on his former experience as a collections agent for the J. Burns department stores, Hobart found work as a collections officer for a Miami bank until he retired in 1990. "I was eligible for their pension plan, so I decided to go for the easy life," he explains. With his exhaustive career (spook show impresario, nightclub performer, werewolf impersonator, make-up artist, pitch man, theater checker, movie promoter, actor, collections agent, and interview subject), one can't blame him.

Although two of his four sons had a brief flirtation with show business, Hobart admits that he "tried to steer them away from it." But the Hobart family hasn't entirely escaped the trappings of greaspaint and kleig lights. Hobart's nephew Barry was Dr. Creep, a ghoulish horror-show host, on the Shock Theatre t.v. series which appeared on station WKEF, channel 22 in Dayton, Ohio from 1973 to 1985! (Barry Hobart can be seen as Doctor

Creep on **The Best Of Shock Theatre**, a VHS-only video available for \$23.95 postpaid from EIA/Shock Theatre, P.O. Box 10, Dayton, OH 45406). "My dad (Doug Hobart's brother) used to take me to see my uncle's spook shows," Barry Hobart recalls. "Even back then I wanted to be like him." Was he the inspiration for the Dr. Creep character? "Yes, I've tried to carry on the tradition in television."

For Doug Hobart himself, the past will suffice. "Although I still love the business, I wouldn't want to be in it today," he explains. "For one thing, it doesn't seem to be much fun anymore. Making movies was tougher back then, I'll tell you that, but it was also a lot of fun. That's why we did it!" Although he hasn't worked on a movie in eighteen years, Hobart has the disease in his blood to this day. He's found relief through a love/hate relationship with the technological innovation that saved his films from oblivion: the VCR. Watching at home is all that is left for him, or for us.

*[The author wishes to thank the following for their help in providing information and/or videotapes for this article: Joseph Adler, David F. Friedman, Bill Grefe, Barry Hobart, Bill Kelley, Barry Mahon, Rick Martin, Jim McCabe, Don Metz, Fred Olen Ray, Mike Vraney, and especially Doug Hobart himself. **The Weird World Of LSD and Savages From Hell** are available for \$23 each postpaid from Something Weird Video, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98155. **The Curse Of The Doll People, The Vampire, Santa Claus, and Fireball Jungle** are available for \$19 each postpaid from Sinister Cinema, P.O. Box 4369, Medford, OR 97501-0168.*

Snatches of Antiquity

With his 1966 feature **The Raw Ones**, filmmaker John Lamb almost singlehandedly destroyed the taboo against depicting full-frontal nudity in motion pictures. The film's non-erotic context, a documentary view of nudism, enabled civil libertarians to defend it against charges of prurient interest from censor boards and decency crusaders alike. Lamb's follow-up, **She Did It His Way**, added a mildly titillating narrative to the naked bodies on display. Other filmmakers followed Lamb's lead, and full-frontal nudity sans the social relevance of **The Raw Ones** rapidly became a staple of the sexploitation movie.

Before long, opportunistic pornographers were testing the limits of local censor boards with even more daring fare. Among these were the so-called "split beaver" films, in which nude female subjects would part their legs and display their genitalia to the viewer. Beaver loops, primarily shot in 16mm to be shown in coin-operated arcades or sold by mail order, first flourished in the mid-sixties in San Francisco, New York, Seattle, and other cities with more liberal attitudes towards pornography than the rest of the country. As with their nudist predecessors, the beaver films were legally restricted from depicting overt sexual behavior; to do so would have been in violation of court obscenity rulings. But by 1969, the beaver film had evolved into the next logical step: hardcore porn. The latter's appearance rendered the beaver, in which no actual sex was allowed to occur, an archaic relic of less tolerant times.

Thanks to the pandering perverts at Something Weird Video, the beaver genre has reappeared as a twelve-volume set entitled **Bucky Beaver's XXX Stags, Loops and Peeps from the 50's and 60's**. Gynecologists beware: viewing this series will be akin to taking your job home with you. The **Bucky Beaver** collection constitutes over twenty hours of "vertical smiles," authentic beaver loops in black-and-white and color from the pre-legalized hardcore era. Because these loops were filmed and displayed silent, Something Weird has scored them to a musical soundtrack of cha-cha tunes, rockabilly, exotica, and softcore soundtrack selections that add a camp sensibility to the prurient proceedings. A sense of authenticity is added by the loops' haphazard arrangement: some begin and end in the middle, as if the viewer has inserted a quarter in the peepshow following another spectator who only paid for half of the running time.



The standard set-up for these loops is strikingly similar. In almost every one, a figure model, often considerably less than attractive, peels off her clothes, reclines on a bed or chaise lounge, and proceeds to writhe about in mock ecstasy while illustrating the 8:10 position with her legs, all the while coming on to the camera (and, consequently, the viewer). Meanwhile, the intrepid camera lens travels south for extended close-ups of Mount Pleasant. For variation, some subjects fondle a prop (pillow, stuffed animal, volleyball, picture frame) while submitting to the camera's unwavering gaze.

As might be imagined, these extended displays of velutinous vulvas rapidly grow monotonous in their repetition. The mind tends to wander when confronted with loop after loop of these artless, plot-free exercises in voyeurism. But tedium eventually gives way to a heightened awareness of the humanity behind all this flesh. One woman flips through a wallet pulled from her purse, revealing photographs of smiling people. Are these her parents, unaware that they have been made part of a pornographic film? Another big-boned gal occasionally laughs at unheard remarks from out of camera range. When the camera follows her sojourn off the motel room bed that serves as her stage, we see that she has been directing her remarks to a fat, shabbily-dressed man seated nearby. His appearance is unexpected, shattering the illusion of intimacy between sex object and viewer that these loops so desperately strive to forge. Who is he? Is he her pimp? Husband? Father? We want to know more but never will, for the revelation is unintentional. It's not part of the bargain.

All twelve volumes of the **Bucky Beaver** series are rounded out with vintage hardcore loops that were no doubt sold from under the counter before the presentation of graphic sex was made legal in the early seventies. Several of these, such as the black and white **The Nun** and the animated **Buried Treasure**, have appeared in previous compilations (most notably in Alex DeRenzy's landmark documentary **A History Of The Blue**

Movie, which was also the source of striptease footage seen in Johnny Legend's **Sleazemania**). Others, no doubt from private collections, are making their above-ground debut.

For viewers in search of salacious entertainment, the twelve volumes of **Bucky Beaver's XXX Stags, Loops and Peeps from the 50's and 60's** will no doubt serve as a reminder that familiarity is a figurative cold shower. For the more sociologically minded, the series will prove to be an embarrassment of riches. Apart from the occasionally humorous juxtaposition of music and image, and the odd, behind-the-scene glimpses of the real people behind the fantasy, there is little here worth recommending to the casual viewer. Nevertheless, Something Weird Video is to be commended for the preservation of film footage that the American Film Institute isn't likely to be concerned with. Their recent announcement of the impending release of thirteen more volumes should be greeted with respect, if not enthusiasm.

[The twenty-five volumes of Bucky Beaver's XXX Stags, Loops and Peeps from the 50's and 60's are available for \$20 each, plus \$3.00 postage for the first tape and \$1.50 for each subsequent tape, from Something Weird Video, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, Washington 98155.]

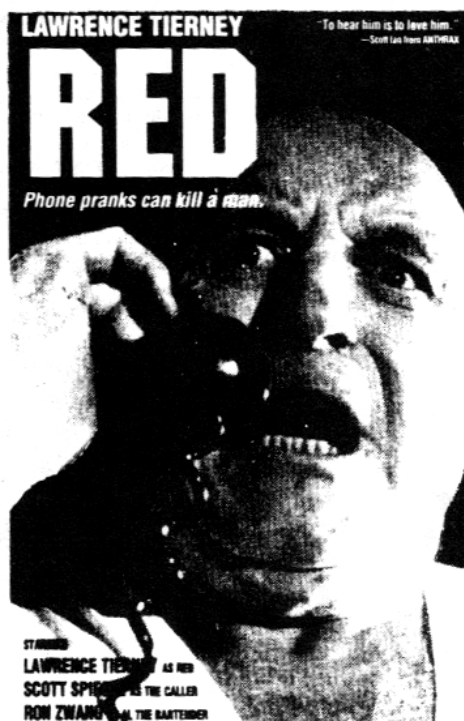
Next Time, Maybe

What with commercial cinema being, by and large, a derivative proposition based on ledger reports and star appeal, the sales potential for independently-made home video has never been better. **Psychotronic Video** and **Film Threat**, along with hundreds of movie fanzines worldwide, have helped spread the word on independent features. These do-it-yourselfers are reminiscent of the "underground" filmmakers of the sixties who led an aesthetic rebellion against movie stagnation. Their movement was ultimately co-opted and mass marketed by Hollywood, much as the punk revolution of the late seventies was tamed into "new wave" by fat-cat record magnates in the eighties. In both instances the public, if not the critics, seemed to prefer the commercial offering. Now as then, those whose interests are not spurred by the tidal wave of public interest will continue to support the indie scene after the aura of faddism has faded. What this means is that money is wasted on bogus endeavors while true innovators must compromise.

Although the independent movement both needs and deserves your support, let the buyer beware. A real danger exists when overzealous writers heap praise upon poorly made independent productions simply because they were conceived outside of the hated Hollywood realm or because they were made by friends of the reviewer. Before long, consumers reject the videos along with the hype.

The following videos are representative of this problem. Although they've received favorable coverage in a few publications, all three fall short. Two contain original concepts that, unfortunately, collapse amid incompetence and excess. Exhibit A is **Red** (Film Threat Video), the latest offering from **Film Threat** editor Chris Gore.

Red, which clocks in at 35 minutes, was inspired by the infamous Tube Bar tape. [For those who have spent the last four years in cryogenic slumber, the Tube Bar tape is a recorded series of prank phone calls played on Red, a foul mouthed, gravel-voiced bartender in New York's Tube Bar.] Somehow Gore convinced tough-guy actor Lawrence Tierney, most recently seen in the bloody crime comedy **Reservoir Dogs**, to portray Red in his miniscule-budgeted film adaptation of the tape. As one might imagine, what goes wrong is not Tierney's fault.



The first half of **Red** represents Gore's most successful project to date. As the actual Tube Bar tape plays on the soundtrack, Tierney is shown reacting to the aural outrages in a series of black and white still photos. The hysterical soundtrack is the center of attention, with the photos providing a visual enhancement. This technique, most notably used by Chris Marker in his avant-garde sci-fi featurette **Le Jettée** back in 1963, is eerily effective. Tierney's expressive face illustrates Red's mounting anger over the caller's increasingly scatological outrages.

So far, so good. But then, as if he were fearful of accusations of "artiness," Gore cowardly backs down from his original idea and presents a gory, amateurish black and white movie depicting Red's imagined revenge against his tormentors. This segment seems commercially motivated, especially when noting that many of the home-grown videos offered for sale in Gore's magazine - such as the grossly overrated **Nekromantik** - are of the gore-drenched horror genre.

Although the first segment packs a true wallop (and affords an easy way to get the best parts of the Tube Bar tape itself), the conclusion is both silly and stupid. Perhaps for a nominal fee,

some enterprising bootlegger will tack the first half - the good part - on the end of another tape so viewers can get a taste of what might have been an underground classic.

[Red is available from Film Threat Video, Dept. EC, P.O. Box 3170, Los Angeles, CA 90078-3170 for \$21.95 postpaid.]

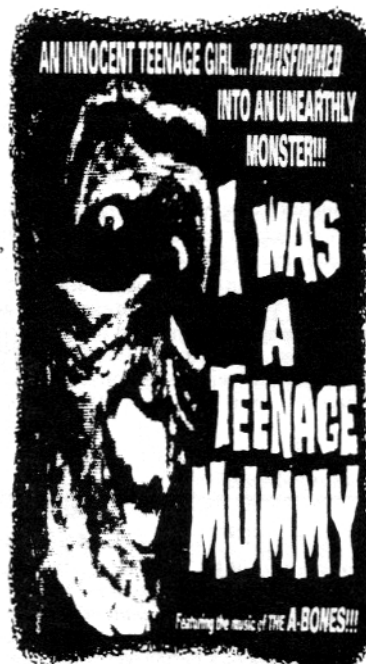
Another disappointment is the black and white *I Was A Teenage Mummy* (Ghost Limb Films), Christopher Frieri's spoof of 50's teen potboilers and the Universal mummy series. Like his earlier *The Orbitrons*, an ode to the schlocky sci-fi films of Ed Wood, *Teenage Mummy* updates the genre with outrageous gore effects and scatological humor. But *Mummy*, unlike his former movie, just plain isn't funny.

Frieri's anti-heroes, a pack of leather-jacketed "high school students" (jeez, these guy must be dumb - they look to be at least in their late twenties, just like in the AIP teen flicks) spout greaseball platitudes and give a swirlie to an Egyptian exchange student named "Ray" Mahat. When Ray (who's reminiscent of Fuad Ramses from *Blood Feast* as played by a young Jerry Lewis) spots straight-edge teen queen Stella Maris, he recognizes her as the reincarnation of the goddess Isis and proceeds to transform her into his mummy. As the jive-talking greasers are dispatched in gruesome fashion by the obedient, gauze-swathed teenager, a fat slobola detective named Jack Boyle sniffs around for clues.

In Frieri's *Orbitrons*, the technical incompetence somehow added to the charm; here, it's a definite hindrance. Clumsy editing and uneven acting (why does Ray Mahat laugh so much?) are the chief offenders, but the film also sorely lacks

the loony ambition of its predecessor. Indeed, *I Was A Teenage Mummy* is uncomfortably poised between enthusiastic amateurism and lackluster semi-professionalism, with an unfortunate emphasis on the latter. Frieri himself seems to have been less than enthusiastic.

Still, *Teenage Mummy* does have its moments. Snatches of dialogue from the hoods and the detective are reminiscent of the earlier film's deadpan howlers ("It's a bedtime story, trust me," offers the disheveled dick in explaining virginal Stella's disappearance). New York's A-Bones preside at a teen dance that brings to mind such trashy R&R scenes as the infamous "Jello butt" sequence from *The Creeping Terror*. But fans of



The Orbitrons are destined to be disappointed with this follow-up. Frieri has announced that his next feature will be a twisted tribute to film noir. Good idea. From the evidence presented in *I Was A Teenage Mummy*, it's time to move on.

[*I Was A Teenage Mummy* is available from Ghost Limb Films, Dept. EC, P.O. Box 3066, Hoboken, NJ 07030 for \$18.95 postpaid.]

Our final film is a made-in-1987 effort from Baltimore's own Don Dohler, who has previously churned out a number of amateurish horror and sci-fi features with titles such as *The Alien Factor* and *The Fiend*. This time, Dohler presents a tale of four ruthless video store bandits (!?) who run afoul of an offbeat family residing in a remote farmhouse. What happens to them shouldn't happen to man or beast, even in a Don Dohler movie.

Blood Massacre (shades of Al Adamson!) isn't likely to boost Dohler's career any more than his previous attempts have, although the film does boast decent camera work and appropriately garish lighting from Chris Chrysler and Jeff Herberger. This slickness is hampered, however, by what appears to be a post-production lack of moolah. After a professionally designed title logo, credits appear that resemble what one would expect from a Radio Shack titling gizmo...the economy model at that. Also, numerous scratches indicate that the video was chained from Dohler's workprint.

But even a Stephen Spielberg-sized budget wouldn't have made much of a difference with the ridiculous script from Dohler, Barry Gold, and Dan Buchl. That it took three



George Stover strikes in Don Dohler's *Blood Massacre*.

people to write lines such as, "That was 'Nam, that's different...death was in season!," is truly frightening. Nevertheless, the dialogue will have some viewers browning their Barcaloungers in helpless spasms of laughter. And the casual suspension of rationality at the film's conclusion seems almost, but not quite, surreal. "Why do I watch movies?," you may find yourself wondering.

Some will watch **Blood Massacre** for the presence of Baltimore's George Stover. The mild-mannered Stover, a Dohler alumnus who is best known for playing the "normal" in the films of John Waters, is wildly miscast as Rizzo, a vicious murderer. Yet amazingly, Stover manages to overcome his unthreatening build and past roles, snarling such lines as "If you just wet your pants, little girl, then run back home to Mommy" with venomous conviction. But although the script prepares us for it with his Vietnam background, having Stover

become a Rambo-type survivalist during the concluding moments seems ludicrous (especially since the weapon he constructs from a tool shed's contents looks like something out of the *Flying Guillotine* movies).

One cannot fairly fault Stover or any of the film's other actors (whose abilities range from hopeful to embarrassing) for the shortcomings of **Blood Massacre** (3 Star Video). It just should have never been made. That considerable money and effort were expended on such a derivative, hackneyed horror film when other filmmakers cannot find funding for more worthwhile projects is truly obscene. But hey, that's exploitation.

[*Blood Massacre* is available from 3 Star Releasing, 15745 Stagg St., Van Nuys, CA 91406. Please don't tell 'em ECCO sent you!]

Tomes du Jour

As the shelves of good bookstores expand with specialized volumes on the art (or business) of moviemaking, we bleary-eyed bookworms at ECCO will try and accommodate this avalanche of vade mecums with reviews of those rarefied references that hobble along to our own discordant beat. This issue we take a look at two books about drive-in culture, one an actual reference and the other a madcap memoir. We also examine two very different treatises on hardcore pornography.

Kerry Segrave's hardcover reference book **Drive-In Theaters** (McFarland) traces the history of outdoor movies from their inception in 1933 to their current state of decline. Along the way, Segrave topples many well-cherished fallacies promulgated in today's revisionist culture by Joe Bob Briggs and other mavens of lowbrow entertainment.

For example, Segrave claims that the image of the drive-in as a passion pit for horny teens was spread by civic-minded moralists opposed to the drive-in concept. In fact, families - not teenagers - were the major patrons of drive-ins during their heyday. Before the sixties, men and women were obligated by social demands to dress in semi-formal attire for a night on the town. The drive-in allowed them to see a movie without having to dress up. They could also bring the children, circumventing the need for hiring a babysitter. What's more, the privacy of watching a movie in your own car enabled movie-hating hubbys to drink themselves into a stupor while their wives followed the exploits of the latest matinee idol.

Along with the positive aspects of the "ozoner" experience, Segrave also catalogues the downside: poor sound, inferior image, exposure to the elements, etc. He also recounts how the major studios frowned upon drive-ins, withholding new releases from outdoor exhibitors so indoor operators would always have a competitive edge. Drive-in devotees and the merely curious

will both finish Segrave's book with a thorough understanding of why drive-ins were successful in their prime, as well as why they ultimately failed.

Unfortunately, Segrave ruminates excessively on legal battles over drive-in copyrights and other business matters while

glossing over the patrons' actual experience. For example, he provides only a cursory mention of the insect coils sold at drive-in snack bars.

Middle-aged drive-in vets will no doubt recall the kitschy black-and-white ads for Pic, the brand of choice, that was often seen during intermission. There is also little elaboration on the public service announcements, usually anti-drug or alcoholism, that were prominently screened during the late sixties and early seventies.

And how can any discussion of drive-in concession food fail to mention "Flavos," those limp, soggy excuses for eggrolls that came wrapped in a grease-soaked packet decorated with

a grinning, buck-toothed coolie caricature? Where are the statistics on how many moviegoers succumbed from eating these deep-fried disasters? [Yours truly once barfed up a concession hot dog during a 1962 drive-in engagement of *The Manchurian Candidate*. The adult cousin who bought it for me was consequently tried for attempted murder.] Although

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these details may be seen as minor in the face of Segrave's scholarship, they would have added much-needed color to what is often a bland, cut-and-dry read.

Nevertheless, **Drive-In Theaters** is a sure bet for any devotee of B-movies who wonders why the drive-ins failed. Although Segrave never mentions Herschell Gordon Lewis or Al Adamson by name, those who read this book will understand why the "works" of such filmmakers played almost exclusively at drive-ins. Additionally, it's generously illustrated with vintage photos of a plethora of drive-ins both typical and bizarre, and features an appendix that contains the original 1933 drive-in copyright application along with an enormous bibliography. If only it were more fun to read, **Drive-In Theaters** would be a definitive work.

[*Drive-In Theaters* is available for \$34.50 postpaid from McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640.]

Readers disappointed by the scarcity of discussion in Segrave's book about the type of movie most commonly associated with the drive-in nowadays - the exploitation genre - may find satisfaction in the pages of *Flying Through Hollywood By The Seat Of My Pants* (Birch Lane Press/\$18.95), the funny, freewheeling autobiography of American International Pictures head Samuel Z. Arkoff. With his partner James Nicholson, Arkoff virtually created the "drive-in" movie. Along the way, the two entrepreneurs also invested in the careers of a number of filmmakers, chiefly drive-in king Roger Corman, and provided early opportunities for future superstars Michael Landon (*I Was A Teenage Werewolf*) and Jack Nicholson (*The Raven*).

Arkoff and co-writer Richard Trubo's chatty, informal writing style helps *Flying Through Hollywood* overcome the stuffiness of many other movie memoirs. The numerous recollections of brushes with Hollywood greats are not attempts at name-dropping by a

minor-league player; they're illuminating accounts of the often insecure psyches lurking behind the image. For example, Walt Disney's perceived role as father to protege Annette Funicello is hilariously brought to light by Arkoff's recollections of the Mouse King's telephone calls protesting the bosomy former Mouseketeer's role in AIP's "bikini beach" movies. A favorite quote: "Sam, what are you doing to my little girl?"

Legions of AIP fans often think of AIP as beginning and ending with producer/director Roger Corman, a connection not dispelled by the latter's own autobiography (reviewed in ECCO #14). For them, Arkoff's reminiscence of telling partner Nicholson that "...we need more than Roger..." may

smack of blasphemy. Although he was their most prolific filmmaker, AIP was much more than Corman. *Flying Through Hollywood By The Seat Of My Pants* helps even the historical balance, portraying the company as seen by the man who signed the checks. If the book isn't as fascinating as William Castle's recently republished autobiography, it's because Arkoff, a regular Joe, isn't as entertainingly eccentric as the late showman and schlockmeister. Arkoff's book is the tale of a businessman who, frightened early in his career by a heart attack that seems to have provided him with an epiphany of his own mortality, bravely forged ahead in creating an industry perched precariously on the cusp of the commercial cinema and the pandering world of exploitation.

Speaking of which, the "pandering world of exploitation" has rarely been the subject of such lucid a text as *Hard Core*, subtitled *Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (University of California Press). Author Linda Williams, who is Professor of Film Studies at the University of California, Irvine, has written a remarkable book about the semantics of hardcore pornography. That her treatise is written with a feminist perspective is all the more amazing in that Williams eschews the usual pro-censorship position in favor of a more open-minded approach to understanding the explicit fantasies of a patriarchal society. It is a bold work that questions some dearly



held precepts of both feminism and film criticism, and is as likely to influence future writing about sex films as Carol J. Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws* has about the horror genre.

One of Williams' most intriguing observations is the difficulty of filmmakers to depict female ecstasy with the explicit degree of the male "come shot." Such attempts inevitably must be articulated through a phallogocentric understanding of feminine pleasure, which is no understanding at all. To Williams, addressing female pleasure is porn's weakest link, both thematically and culturally, in depicting what she refers to as "the truth of sex." It is Williams' hope that women producer/directors such as Candida Royalle and R. Lauren Neimi will eventually make sex films that aren't "...too arty for men and still too hardcore for most women..." (although this man objects to the implication that we're all art-hating barbarians slaving for nothin' but "meat shots." It's probably true, but I object anyway).

Although the concept at first sounds hopelessly contrived, Williams also carries off a comparison between the similar structures of the hardcore feature and the classic Hollywood musical through the use of author Rick Altman's *The American Film Musical*.

Radley Metzger's *The Opening Of Misty Beethoven* is used by Williams to illustrate how Altman's observations on the episodic structure of the musical can be transferred to those films in which the sexual interludes do not interrupt the narrative, but rather enhance it.

As with her 1981 treatise on surrealism and film, *Figures Of Desire*, Williams delights in shaking up preconceived notions fostered by influential texts or ideologies. No trace of the Dworkin/MacKinnon breast-beating is to be found in *Hard Core*, although those who would like to pretend that hardcore porn is free of misogyny may be angered by some of Williams' contentions. But the fact that a scholarly work from a writer such as Williams would recognize that pornography should be neither reviled nor ignored is alone a major stepping stone in understanding the dichotomy between male and female desire as expressed in the wish-fulfillment of motion pictures.

Porn (Yale University Press/\$30), a far different but no less valid book on the same subject, consists entirely of interviews with filmmakers and performers in the hardcore porn industry.

Rather than using these interviews as the basis for theorizing, author Robert J. Stoller, M.D. allows the reader to draw conclusions based on the words of his subjects. Subtitled "*Myths for the Twentieth Century*," Stoller's book reveals that the stars and creators of heterosexual porn, almost to the one, view themselves as outcasts in a society that doesn't deserve them.

Pent-up rage against parents, women, men, authority figures, or the hypocrisy of middle-class values fuels these collected diatribes, all collected by Dr. Stoller through personal conversations with these subjects afforded by his status as psychoanalyst. What is striking in Stoller's collection of interviews is the ever-pervasive "us vs. them" mentality expressed by both sexes, although the role of men and women in porn has traditionally been viewed in opposing terms. In his informative introduction and conclusion, Stoller points out that, while pornography has never been reliably linked to sexual violence, almost all of his subjects have suffered childhood abuse of either a physical or mental nature. Their porn personas appear to be a cathartic attempt to exorcise the very real demons of their childhood.

Aside from those necessarily hidden by pseudonyms, Stoller's interviewees include porn filmmaker/professional egotist William Margold (who was recently busted in Las Vegas for pandering at an adult book and video store during the Consumer Electronics Show), sex stars Kay

Parker and Nina Hartley (who was arrested along with Margold), and writer Jim Holliday (although that name is a professional pseudonym). Because of the disparity between his subjects' porn incarnations and their true sense of identity as revealed in this book, some readers may suspect that Dr. Stoller has been deceived. But, after all, moviemaking itself is a deceptive art dependent upon fantasy, and rarely have these social rebels been given a platform for their views in such a serious endeavor. What would they gain from lying?

Because of Stoller's non-judgmental documentation and his steadfast refusal to draw conclusions, *Porn* is best viewed as a tool for attempting to understand the societal implications of hardcore pornography. As such, it is not likely to be used as a weapon by either the "anti" or "pro" forces. Nevertheless, as Stoller himself suggests, *Porn* is a perfect illustrative complement to Linda Williams' book, reviewed above. For once, we are allowed to hear the voices from the "playpen of the damned" without theorizing or censure.



NEXT ISSUE

"A Taste Of Blood" with Bill Rogers!

Mondo Pioneers Martin and Osa Johnson!

Plus more bizarre features and video reviews. Miss it and miss out!

